

# **RECRUITING TODAY'S YOUTH:**

## **How Can We Increase Youth Propensity to Join the Air Force during this Millennium?**

by

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## **Introduction**

Since the end of the Cold War, youth propensity, the stated likelihood that a youth will volunteer to serve in the military, has declined. Many reasons have been cited for this decline, and the fact that “economics are good” always leads the pack. Although economics are good, a rising stock market and its components should not be considered showstoppers for recruiting our nation’s youth to serve in the Air Force. This paper will examine the decline of today’s youth propensity as related to Air Force recruiting. Then, based on findings, recommendations will be made for long-term initiatives focused on enhancing propensity trends.

Why is propensity so important? Annual data on propensity to enlist helps predict the number of youth that may serve in the military--lower propensity equals the likelihood of lower enlistment. Dr. Jerry Lehnus and his staff at the Defense Manpower Data Center have tracked youth career plans and enlistment propensity since 1975. Annual results of their Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) provide data used by Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD), service secretaries and chiefs, and services personnel and recruiting experts. YATS indicated positive propensity declined from 23 percent in 1989 to under 19 percent in 1998--the lowest it has ever been. This paper will look at why propensity dropped so drastically in the past few years and what measures can be taken to turn this situation around.

Propensity decline has gained the attention of the most senior Air Force leadership. If youth are becoming less and less likely to enlist, then it is also less likely the service will meet its annual manpower requirements. Inability to meet these requirements will eventually effect the ability of the services to accomplish

their respective missions. Since these missions are vital to maintaining our nation's National Security--it is imperative we determine why propensity is steadily declining and what can be done to increase positive trends. It is clear youth attitudes must be changed; and as a consequence, increased propensity may follow. Air Force leadership must not hesitate to appeal to prevalent influencers and develop ways to change their attitude about military service. Motivating today's youth toward a more positive attitude is a major priority; and therefore, must be the basic foundation for reversing present propensity trends.

To gather the data needed to analyze today's youth attitudes, Air Force approved surveys were conducted with almost 500 people. These surveys provided a unique body of primary data which supplemented this study and offered an opportunity to extend upon existing analysis. Groups surveyed included first term airmen, company grade officers, recruiters, military training instructors, and college and high school students. Due to limitations, gathering information concerning "why they joined the Air Force" from fairly new Air Force members, their instructors, and recruiters was "do-able." Future research should gather data and analyze the reasons non-military individuals did not enlist. Recruiters and instructors were considered key respondents because they had the closest contact with youth who were likely to enlist or were currently serving their first term in the Air Force. Additional methodology for this research included conducting interviews, focus groups, and discussions with Air Force experts on personnel, recruiting, accessions policy, and advertising. This research also required an extensive review of current and past DoD and non-DoD publications on propensity, recruiting, and



related topics.

Data for this study was gathered using Air Force approved surveys designed specifically for this research. A total of 497 respondents included: 100 basic trainees at Lackland AFB, Texas; 61 first airmen and trainees at Keesler AFB, Mississippi; 18 company grade officers at Keesler, AFB; 26 recruiters stationed in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida; 53 military training instructors assigned at Keesler AFB, Lackland AFB, and Georgia Technical Institute AFROTC; 61 college students attending Clark Atlanta University and Georgia Institute of Technology; and 178 high school students from Clinton, Maryland and Mesquite, Texas.

This paper discusses current recruiting challenges, related propensity studies, and Air Force leadership's present approach to addressing propensity decline. This paper also provides analysis of the survey conducted in conjunction with this research. The final chapters include recommended Air Force options to enhance long-term propensity and this author's conclusions based on research, interviews, and numerous discussions with subject area experts.

Broader and more in-depth research is still needed in this area. The Air Force must continue to focus on propensity and the factors that cause it to increase or decrease. More specifically, the service must place emphasis on determining what affects youth attitudes, stay abreast of the negative influences and, where and whenever possible, and proactively work to turn around false perceptions that can result in negative propensity trends.

## **Chapter 1**

### **The Recruiting Challenge**

Fiscal Year (FY) 1999 proved to be the toughest Air Force recruiting period since 1979. Air Force leadership sets annual recruiting goals based on projected manpower requirements. In the past, the Air Force has met or exceeded its challenge to attract new airmen to serve. However, recruiting goals set for FY 1999 presented an insurmountable challenge--the goal of 33,800 was missed by 1,732. Recruiting had not been this tough since immediately after the Vietnam War in the mid-1970s.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, this was only the ninth time in 44 years of record keeping the Air Force had not met a recruiting goal.<sup>2</sup>

Competition for recruiting today's youth has become a complex issue that beckons Air Force leadership's closest attention. Obstacles to a healthy recruiting environment must be identified, scrutinized, and then minimized. Service officials generally blame: 1) the vigorous national economy; 2) competition from colleges; 3) low military pay; 4) high operations tempo; 5) the growing estrangement between most civilians and the military; 6) uninspiring ad campaigns and 7) declining propensity.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, all of these factors contributed to the difficulties the Air Force has had in meeting its recruiting goals. Today's youth represent a generation with new attitudes (discussed in chapter 2), and consequently, it follows the Air Force must be prepared to attract them with a totally fresh approach--an approach that realistically addresses the factors addressed in this paper which can be changed.

This approach requires a closer look at each reason for difficulty in recruiting as stated above by service officials, then determining a course of action to increase propensity and put Air Force recruiting back on the right track.

The first issue, the economy, must be worked around. The Air Force is not in a position to change the direction of our vigorous economy, nor should it wish to do so. This nation is experiencing the lowest unemployment in a quarter century. In fact, "our economic expansion has continued for over six years. It has created a vast number of new jobs and driven the unemployment rate down from over 7.5 percent in 1992 to around 3.8 percent in 1999."<sup>45</sup> Granted, changing the nation's economic status cannot be the goal, but the Air Force can increase efforts to change the way they compete for recruits including the employed, the under employed, and the eligibles within the remaining 3.8 percent who are unemployed. Staying abreast of youth attitudes will aid in determining just what they desire from a job and how the Air Force can fulfill that desire. The issue must extend far beyond the unrelenting efforts to increase pay and benefits to address what's worth more than "the big bucks" to today's youth. Is it patriotism... service to country...quality of life? Or does the answer lie in how they are personally treated...quality job skills...how often they move...or guaranteed jobs upon enlistment? Quality eligibles who are willing to work, but are unemployed, should be studied and then targeted with the type of information that will appeal specifically to them.

In addition to the economy, recruiting difficulties are also blamed on the increased competition from colleges. Benefits from a low unemployment rate include "a lot of money for kids to go to college...so more [kids] are going straight to

college instead of coming into the armed forces as a means to finance their education".<sup>6</sup> Unlike the economy, this is an area which can be addressed directly by the Air Force. A study conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide Incorporated indicates "today's teens know how important a college education is in today's global economy." This is a factor that reveals over 69 percent of the teens surveyed plan to go to a four-year or two-year college. Yet, their plans may not completely rule out the military. Even with the booming economy, not every teen has the finances to follow their college-bound dreams directly out of high school. Consequently, their research indicates about 2 percent are considering the military as a way to earn money for college.<sup>7</sup> The services should capitalize on this fact and look for ways to make the military's educational benefits more attractive to youth who are looking for that specific benefit. An Assistant Secretary of Defense's congressional testimony urged "Continuing to press Congress to improve military education benefits is vital to our recruiting efforts".<sup>8</sup> The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) must continue recommending reforms to education benefit programs. Increased educational benefits will show potential recruits the Air Force fully endorses programs to help them achieve their intellectual goals and is willing to help finance their goals when they agree to serve. The original GI Bill offered during the 70's (which helped provide this author's education) was a valuable and effective recruiting tool. It required no cash outlay from the member. Later versions of educational assistance stipulated that members contribute personal funds and the Air Force would supplement those funds for college tuition. Recruiters may sell the Air Force to more college hopefuls by returning to a

program that truly helps military personnel lessen their personal financial burden while achieving their educational goals.

Service officials are all aware of the need to increase pay and benefits, the most often cited reasons for recruiting difficulties. A positive step was the President's \$289 billion 1999 defense bill that included a substantial pay raise. In his March 1999 testimony to Congress, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, Frank Rush said, "The 4.4 percent across the board raise represented the largest increase in basic military pay in nearly a generation. In addition, annual raises matching the currently forecasted rate of civilian wage growth have been programmed in Fiscal Years 2001 through 2005."<sup>9</sup> Increased attention toward better pay is a recruiting strategy that cannot go wrong.

Another strategy would be to increase recruiting efforts toward non-college-bound teens. The Roper study indicated about 8 percent have no plans to go to college because they plan to get a full-time job.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Robert Lerman of the American University and Hillard Pouncy of Swarthmore College conducted research on the growing disparity between the economic fates of youth who attend college and those who do not. Analysis of the wages paid to non-college graduates indicated their earnings have declined over the last 15 years.<sup>11</sup> This is very useful information for Air Force recruiters. Non-college wage earners have already established their willingness to join the labor force, so attracting them to work for the military should be a natural next step. Although service officials are not in direct control of the pay issues, continuing their efforts to increase military pay and benefits may be the most effective strategy in attracting more working teens to the military.

Air Force leadership continues to address the next reason for poor recruiting, high operations tempo. Bluntly, this factor can be assessed as working too hard, too many hours, and far too many days away from home and family. As early as 1995, then Secretary of the Air Force (SECAF) Sheila Widnall discussed the criticality of operations tempo and its eventual effect on Air Force people. She said this issue was "very much related to our ability to attract and maintain high-caliber people."<sup>12</sup> At that time, nearly 10,000 people were deployed and the official response included the promise of a more vigorous employment of Guard and Reserve forces. In 1998, General Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff, responded to the distress call of an even higher operations tempo by instituting the Expeditionary Aerospace Force (EAF) concept which included a predictable schedule of presenting Air Force capabilities as Aerospace Expeditionary Forces (AEFs). This new concept makes it possible for Air Force members to have greater predictability and stability as they will know when they will be home and when they will be away; the hope is that this will help alleviate some of the personal and family-related stresses of deployment. It is a welcomed effort and is certainly worth a try. Units from the first pair of AEFs departed in October 1999 and incorporated predictable, scheduled unit deployments on a rotational basis to locations in defense of our nation. "The AEF will affect about 95,000 Air Force people who are forward stationed and deployed throughout the world."<sup>13</sup> Based on comments from commanders and officials in the EAF Outreach Branch [HQ USAF/XOPE] at the Pentagon, this has been a successful Air Force effort.<sup>14</sup> Suffice it to say, the jury is still out on the AEFs as to whether their scheduling processes will realistically improve tempo for the majority of the troops.

It is a worthwhile effort, however, if it reduces some of the negative affects of tempo and helps the Air Force ascend another step in their challenge to meet recruiting goals.

Missing the FY 1999 recruiting goal is also blamed on factors contributing to the mounting estrangement between the military and civilians. First, a disturbing fact: "of all people 65 years old and younger, only 6 percent have military service."<sup>15</sup> Personnel experts have done the math and reveal that military experience in Congress has also declined. Of the 100 senators and 435 representatives, the 100<sup>th</sup> Congress included 70 senators and 225 representatives with military service. The 106<sup>th</sup> Congress showed a sharp decline with only 44 senators and 144 representatives who have had military experience.<sup>16</sup> This means that more than ever before, civilians can not relate firsthand to military life. This hurts recruiting because as young people begin to make their career decisions, fewer influencers are able to discuss the military as an option from their own personal experiences. Recruiting may also be effected by the lack of military experience of the nation's elected officials because they make the policies concerning military issues. This factor, however, should be considered as one that is within control of the Air Force. Leadership must strengthen efforts to educate potential recruits, their advisors, and the Congress about the Air Force and the unique opportunities military service can provide. Staying on cue with current youth attitudes and trends concerning what they are looking for in life may be key to bridging the knowledge gap between the military and the civilian cultures.

Another issue contributing to the gap is society's general misunderstanding of

current military missions abroad. Since the end of the cold war and the communist threat, some civilians find it difficult to grasp exactly why American military forces are deploying to locations in support of humanitarian missions. In the past, it was easy to rally American citizens against the "evils" of communism and the threat it posed to our national security. Currently, however, civilians find it much more difficult to relate to the concepts of "peacekeeping" and "humanitarian" missions. Current Air Force missions are especially complicated to the youth who have few close-at-hand advisors with military experience or knowledge about current world events. Again, it is critical for leadership to make it their priority to inform the American public, especially potential recruits, about the significance of current missions and how the missions directly or indirectly relate to national security. Taking more time to explain and discuss the complexities of Air Force missions would be a worthwhile task with potential to increase future success of Air Force recruiting.

Uninspired advertisements are often cited by service officials as another primary reason for today's declining interest in the military and subsequent failure to meet recruiting goals. This is another factor that is totally within Air Force control. Almost every pronouncement concerning the missed goal for FY 1999 included statements concerning "more paid advertising" as one of the solutions. Actually, there are at least three advertisement-related issues that should be considered: paying for quality advertisements, increasing the American public's recognition of the Air Force slogan, and polishing the Air Force image.

As a result of the missed goal, the Air Force has begun using paid television



advertising for the first time. Prior to FY 1999, the Air Force was less concerned about advertising because they had no problem reaching annual recruiting goals. In the past, public service announcements (PSAs) were the only source of TV advertisements for the Air Force. They were free. But, as is true for anything that's free, the PSAs were not generally aired during prime time and they lacked the overall quality and focus that can be developed with paid advertising. For FY 1999, beginning in February, the Air Force spent "\$17 million on [TV] advertising...and this year [FY 2000] the service plans on spending \$37 million more."<sup>17</sup>

Coupled with the necessity to produce paid advertisements is the issue of poor recognition of the Air Force slogan. "The Air Force was faced with the fact that 'Aim High' started with a low audience recognition rate that's fallen two percentage points per year since 1994--only 17 people out of every 100 surveyed can identify it as the Air Force ad slogan. Raising awareness is the current goal with ads placed on shows featuring young adults or during televised sporting events".<sup>18</sup>

Another issue concerns polishing the Air Force image. The Air Force is debating whether to change its slogan altogether. "World Ready" was the slogan suggested by Siegel & Gale, a New York based public relations firm hired by the Air Force to develop image enhancing initiatives. According to the agency, the slogan they suggested incorporates the "world class and mission ready" concept.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the service should also consider preserving tradition and keeping the "Aim High" slogan. Placing more emphasis on increasing public awareness of "Aim High" by allocating a portion of the enhanced advertising budget toward this goal may be

more cost effective. A new slogan would mean replacing or repainting everything with the old slogan on it. As of this writing, final decisions have yet to be made and leadership has not fully committed to accepting the new slogan. Whatever the outcome, it is encouraging to see leadership make bold moves to enhance the Air Force image with paid advertising, a realistic advertising budget, and the possibility of a new slogan.

Regardless of Air Force leadership's decision to stick with "Aim High" or break with tradition and change to another slogan, the decline of youth propensity to join the military will continue to be an issue which must be addressed. In fact, DoD has expressed concern that recruiting will be even tougher for the next five to ten years. In an *Air Force Times* interview, Dr. Steve Sellman, DoD Director of Accession Policy, expressed his concern that the "young people and their influencers have sort of lost track of the role of the military."<sup>20</sup>

Losing track of the military role is also reflected in the results of the annual YATS conducted by the Defense Manpower Data Center. YATS results reveal fewer and fewer youth are likely to enlist in the military. Information for YATS is gathered during a 45-minute interview protocol. It covers major topic areas including youth career plans and their decision-making process, consideration for military enlistment, and their knowledge of the military way of life.<sup>21</sup> Since YATS measures a young person's likelihood to enlist in the military, it is convincing the Air Force would be best served by determining how it can affect or change youth attitudes about the military and subsequently increase positive propensity. Leadership should concentrate on this long-term recruiting strategy.

Advertising dollars should be used to attract the attention of youth before they begin making their career decisions. Since YATS helps predict enlistment based upon “the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of American youth on a variety of issues,”<sup>22</sup> the Air Force should examine ways to attract positive attention from youth while increasing their knowledge about the Air Force. The fact that propensity has declined is extremely important and undisputed, but that fact does not preclude the Air Force from expanding efforts to affect, reverse, and maintain a positive trend.

It is unlikely recruiting will ever be easy again. The booming economy and low unemployment rate, coupled with the enormous increase in college bound youth, present unprecedented challenges to the recruiting mission. Moreover, although the AEF will provide some relief, it does not appear operations tempo will decrease anytime soon. So what should be the next move? Which factors are vulnerable to changes motivated by increased effort?

The Air Force’s power to enhance recruiting efforts is directly related to its willingness to address the factors that are well within its control. Although the economy cannot be controlled, targeting the remaining unemployed or under employed may be worthwhile. Competing with colleges is a formidable challenge, but not impossible. To be a player in the competition for college-bound recruits, Air Force leadership must continue seeking college tuition repayment programs. Although pay and benefits are not within their direct control, indirectly leadership must continue persuading Congress to support increases. The Air Force cannot control operations tempo, but leadership should continue looking for ways to reduce the negative impact of frequent deployments. AEF is a start and increasing the

manning should be the next step. Closing the knowledge and understanding gap between military and civilians is essentially a matter of increasing communication between the two. This factor is within Air Force control. Leadership should seek ways to shrink the gap with outreach programs informing the public about Air Force life, careers, and the essentiality of current missions. It is imperative to: reduce the growing estrangement between civilians and the military; improve the focus of ad campaigns; and most important closely examine youth attitudes which contribute to declining propensity.

Air Force leadership must direct determined efforts to affect and increase youth propensity to enlist. Strengthening efforts to change the controllable factors effecting propensity may lead the Air Force to the long-term solutions they will need to meet recruiting challenges for years to come.

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<sup>1</sup> William Matthews, "Recruiting Worst Since Vietnam War", *Air Force Times*, 11 October 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Public Affairs, "Recruiting Service Falls Short of Fiscal 1999 Enlisted Goal", *News Release*, 6 October 1999, (Randolph AFB, TX: Air Force Recruiting Service), on-line, Internet, 11 October 1999, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Oct1999/n19991006\\_991857.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Oct1999/n19991006_991857.html).

<sup>3</sup> William Matthews, "Recruiting Worst Since Vietnam War", *Air Force Times*, 11 October 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Beth Asch and James R. Hosek, "Military Compensation Trends and Policy Options", Documented Briefing, National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 24 February 1999.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics Data, Washington D.C., 1999, *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, on-line, Internet, 6 November 1999, available from <http://146.142.424/cgi-bin/surveymost.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Kozaryn, "Recruit Quality High, Numbers a Bit Low", American Forces Information Service, November 1998, on-line, Internet, 15 October 1999, available from [http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Nov1998/n11301998\\_9811302.html](http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Nov1998/n11301998_9811302.html).

<sup>7</sup> 1999 Roper Youth Report, Roper Starch Worldwide Incorporated, April 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Frank M. Rush, Jr., Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), Testimony to House Armed Services Committee, 18 March 1999, on-line, Internet, 6 November 1999, available from <http://www.house.gov/hasc/testimony/106thcongress/99-03-18rush.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., <http://www.house.gov/hasc/testimony/106thcongress/99-03-18rush.html>.

<sup>10</sup> 1999 Roper Youth Report, Roper Starch Worldwide Incorporated, April 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Robert I. Lerman, and Hillary Pouncy, "Why America Should Develop a Youth Apprenticeship System", Executive Summary Policy Report No. 5, March 1990, on-line, Internet, 14 December 1999, available from <http://www.dlcppi.org/texts/economic/apprexe.txt>.

<sup>12</sup> Sheila E. Widnall, Secretary of the Air Force, "The Military and American Society", Remarks to Young Presidents' and World Presidents' Organizations, Pentagon, Washington D.C., 2 May 1995, on-line, Internet, 8 October 1999, available from <http://www.af.mil:80/cgi-bin/multigate/html>.

<sup>13</sup> General Michael E. Ryan, Air Force Chief of Staff, Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Washington D.C., 5 January 1999, on-line, Internet, 15 Oct 1999, available from <http://www.defenselink.mil:80/speeches/1999/t19990105-ryan.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Rolfsen, "AEF Assignments for Combat Squadrons Set", *Air Force Times*, 27 December 1999.

<sup>15</sup> William Matthews, "Recruiting Worst Since Vietnam War", *Air Force Times*, 11 October 1999.

<sup>16</sup> 86th Airlift Wing Public Affairs, "Top Personnel Officer Shares Insight on Recruitment", *Air Force News Release*, (US Air Forces in Europe News Service), 18 October 1999, on-line, Internet, 18 October 1999, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Oct1999/n19991018\\_991918.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Oct1999/n19991018_991918.html).

<sup>17</sup> Major John P. McGarrity, Deputy Chief Compensation and Resources, HQ USAF/DPI, interviewed by author, 11 April 2000

<sup>18</sup> Alicia Borlik, "Recruitment Ads: New Strategies, New Messages", American Forces Information Service, on-line, Internet, 14 October 1999, available from [http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Mar1999/n03311999\\_9903313.html](http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Mar1999/n03311999_9903313.html).

<sup>19</sup> Elaine M. Grossman, "Air Force Leaders At Odds Over Unveiling New 'World Ready' Identity", *Inside The Pentagon*, 16 December 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Rick Maze, "10-year Recruiting Forecast Grim", *Air Force Times*, 27 December 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Susan G. Berkowitz, et al, "An In-Depth Study of Military Propensity: Follow-Up Interviews with 1995 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents", Defense Manpower Data Center, April 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Youth Propensity Trends and Studies**

Shortly after the military draft ended in 1973, researchers began looking at the propensity of America's youth to serve voluntarily as military members. Since 1975, annual surveys have been conducted to determine youth propensity or their likelihood to take the oath of enlistment for one of the military services. These surveys helped researchers gather data concerning many aspects of the youth in each generation. First, they provided insight for the future education and career decisions of America's youth. Then, they gave us clues concerning youth immediate and long-term goals. Additionally, they provided an indication of the percentage of eligible youth who would consider military service as a viable option. Annual propensity survey results also helped increase understanding of the current generation, including who or what had the greatest influence on them when laying out plans for their future, and how they viewed the military as a viable career alternative. Ultimately, survey information provided a fairly dependable predictive percentage of young people who might consider enlisting in the military after high school.

This chapter will discuss current propensity trends and how decreasing propensity has have finally affected Air Force recruiting. Next, it will take a look at two studies that provide annual analyses of youth decisions and future plans after high school. Additionally, it will review major characteristics of today's youth, their expectations, and what appeals to them. Finally, this chapter discusses the need to

initiate Air Force specific youth studies and begin to affect youth propensity before their final career decisions are developed.

For over twenty-five years, DoD and Congress have looked to the YATS to predict the percentage of youth in our nation who show a positive response toward considering military service. Since 1975, these statistics have driven the services' strategic plans in determining measures they would take to meet annual recruiting goals. An 11 Jan 2000 policy memorandum from Assistant Secretary of Defense Alphonso Maldon, Jr., stated, "Enlistment propensity is defined as the percentage of youth who state they plan to "definitely" or "probably" enter military service in the next few years. Research has shown the expressed intentions of young men and women are strong predictors of enlistment behavior."

YATS may be a reliable predictor, yet, the fact that the services continue to respond annually to the YATS results appears to be a reactive rather than a proactive posture. Service leadership must tackle the tough issues concerning what causes propensity and how can they more effectively influence youth before they make those career decisions. This would be a first step in developing a long-term strategy for meeting annual recruiting challenges.

It is helpful to review the Air Force's goal accession history as it compares to the YATS results.<sup>23</sup>

<b>USAF ACCESSION GOALS VS USAF POSITIVE PROPENSITY (%)</b>					
<b>Year</b>	<b>AF Goal (%)</b>	<b>Propensity Men 16-21</b>	<b>Propensity Females 16-21</b>	<b>Propensity Males 22-24</b>	<b>Propensity Females 22-24</b>
1991	100	16	9	9	7
1992	100	14	7	10	3
1993	100	14	7	8	2
1994	100	12	5	10	4
1995	100	12	7	10	4
1996	100	12	7	7	3
1997	100	12	6	7	3
1998	100.6	12	7	8	4
1999	95	13	7	10	4

**Table 1:** USAF Accession Goals vs USAF Positive Propensity Percentages

Table 1 indicates the Air Force has enjoyed the luxury of achieving 100 percent recruiting goals 1991 through 1997 and even exceeded its goals in 1998. Based on the FY 1999 YATS survey, positive propensity was indicated when respondents said they “Definitely” or “Probably” would join the Air Force. As shown in the table, percentages for positive propensity for FY 1999 finally took an unimpressive step up from 12 to 13 percent for 16-21 and from 8 to 10 percent for 22-24 year-old males while the female positive propensity percentages remained unchanged for FY 1998 and 1999. One may ask, why be concerned with propensity trends? It is true that propensity didn’t appear to be a predictive component for determining whether the Air Force would meet its recruiting goals until 1999. Overall however, the data clearly shows declining propensity from the higher percentages in the early 90s and today it has finally affected the service’s ability to get the number of airmen needed to sign on the dotted line. Granted, it took a while, but hindsight indicates it was a “heads-up” for propensity’s eventual effect upon Air Force recruiting. Given this connection, the service must make even greater efforts to analyze today’s youth



characteristics, determine what it takes to attract them at a much younger age, and discover how to maintain that attraction year after year until they are recruit eligible.

Tracking annual propensity may be somewhat helpful in planning annual recruiting strategies. It is more important to develop effective and realistic game plans to attract youth and affect their long-term propensity to enlist. This challenge requires a deeper knowledge of the current generation and a harder look at the general characteristics of today's youth.

As discussed earlier, the YATS study concentrates primarily on today's youth characteristics. During testimonies concerning youth propensity, DoD leadership and Congressional officials often refer to the YATS annual propensity percentages.<sup>4</sup> YATS methodology includes annual surveys and follow-up telephone interviews of over 10,000 youth between the ages of 16 and 22. A "definitely will serve" or "probably will serve" response is used to measure positive propensity. YATS data is often quoted as the sole official propensity measure used by the services to stay abreast of each year's youth propensity to join the military.

Another popular study, Monitoring the Future Project (MtF) is conducted by social scientists at the University of Michigan. The project's goals are similar to the YATS as they both seek to predict the future career goals of youth. Beginning in 1975 (the same year YATS began), MtF surveyed students to determine their life's course. High school seniors are surveyed annually with sample follow-ups. Michigan's MtF differs from Manpower Data Center's YATS since MtF conducts its student surveys during the second half of their senior year when they are more

likely to have made definite decisions concerning future military enlistment plans. This method enables researchers to track students who responded with positive propensity to see if they actually join the military within the next one to five years. Consequently, the resulting data reveals more reliable near term enlistment predictability for military service.<sup>5</sup> Near term prediction is good to reach this year or next year's military recruiting goals. If long-term prediction is desired, however, long-term strategies must be activated.

Addressing long-term strategy requires much more than the percentages of high school juniors or seniors who plan to join the military that year or the next. What about the freshmen or sophomores, or even the eighth graders? What are their plans? What do they think about the Air Force? What has the Air Force done to motivate them and attract their interest? What motivates them? What do they want out of life? And then, what can the Air Force do to merge their desires and motivations with military service? Both YATS and MtF studies aptly provide statistics that have been used for the past twenty-five years and provide military propensity in general, but if the Air Force is interested in Air Force propensity, then it would be most productive to develop its own youth characteristic studies. Air Force designed studies could help determine how to attract more youth to the Air Force specifically, rather than military service in general. Then, based on those studies, the Air Force should develop youth programs, projects, and advertising campaigns to spark youth interest in the Air Force and energize their propensity to "Aim High" when they are "World Ready." Reviewing current studies like YATS and MtF may be a good start in developing the Air Force's own--but there are also

other studies.

One such study conducted by Mr. Walker Smith, Yankelovich Partners Inc., looks at generational marketing and attitudes. He divides target generations into three groups, matures (born before 1945), baby boomers (1945-1964), and generation X (1965-1978). "Matures were impacted by the Great Depression and World War II...this shaped a generation characterized by discipline, self-denial, financial and social conservatism, and a sense of obligation."<sup>6</sup> Smith describes boomers as "nurtured in the bountiful post-war period...believe they are entitled to the wealth and opportunity that seemed endless during their youth."<sup>7</sup> He characterizes Generation X as "the generation that follows the boomers...pragmatic people ready to tackle life's challenges, rather than a generation of disillusioned 20-something's."<sup>8</sup> Each generation responds to life based on the societal environment of their times. It is essential to study youth attitudes of the next generation, born 1978 to 1995, to determine what environmental forces influence them and their characterizations. This is key to addressing their needs and subsequently attracting them to military service.

The current generation has many labels attached to it including the Echo Boomers; Generation Y; the Net Generation; the Baby Boomlet; and the Millennials.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the title, they were born from 1978 to 1995 and are between ages 5 and 22. "They have more access to information than any other generation...seek authenticity...plan to go to a four-year college or university and are concerned about decline in moral and social values."<sup>10</sup> And one of the most significant statements concerning this generation is: "while admitting they are

concerned about material possessions, they most value their relationships with family and friends.”<sup>11</sup> Staying attuned to the characteristics of this generation should become the basis of determining strategies to attract youth early and maintain that attraction throughout junior high and high school.

The current generation’s relationship with family and friends is significant. In simple terms, this tells us they are more likely to listen to, and may be heavily influenced by, parents and friends when making future career decisions. Sometimes family influences can present major obstacles. Many parents who are serving or have served in the military are not encouraging their children to follow in their footsteps. Because they perceive a vast decline of benefits, they tend to discourage military service for the generation coming behind them. One chief master sergeant at Keesler AFB captured this sentiment: “Why should I ask my sons to consider the military when I see what they’ve done to me? They’ve made too many changes and too many benefits have eroded. They promised me free health care for life and now I will have to pay for TRICARE. Plus, they’ve played around with our retirement pay for the past few years.”<sup>12</sup> A staff sergeant recruiter in Atlanta fully understands the family influencing relationship of most potential recruits, “My best leads come into my office with a parent. I always talk to the parents to see if they support their daughter or son’s enlistment. If they don’t, that person will be hard to recruit.”<sup>13</sup> Another recruiter put it bluntly, “We see how parents effect a kid’s decision toward joining the military--we’ve seen it for years...But here in a city [Philadelphia] that finds a lot of independent kids on the street, you find that when it comes to leaving town, they won’t do a thing unless

their parents agree.”<sup>14</sup>

To increase propensity to enlist, in light of this generation’s strong family bonds, the service must focus efforts on appealing to their major influencers, parents and relatives. One perspective resolves, “We have a mentoring culture that no longer sees the military as something they would like their sons and daughters to go into...The military is way down on the bottom of the list.”<sup>15</sup> This will not be a simple task since the previous generation of parents and relatives, even those who have served, are not necessarily encouraging their children to serve in the military. One solution may be adding that older generation to the target list for new advertisements and regain their confidence by reminding them of the non-monetary benefits they gained from their military service. The Air Force should emphasize the areas leadership has improved like: quality of life programs, private and semi-private dormitories, and the intrinsic benefits of the new AEF. Military parents and relatives have traditionally been valuable Air Force recruiters for their family, friends and other relatives--so target them.

The current generation is living in a highly competitive environment. High technology corporations need recruits that are smart, quick learners, and ambitious. Those same qualities are necessary for today’s Air Force to meet its increasingly high tech mission. “Today, the US has about 10 million males ages 17 to 21. The competition for skilled labor is more intense than it has been since the 1960s...the military is just not competitive.”<sup>16</sup> Competition is key. Competing to increase the youth propensity to enlist will be a tough job that only gets tougher. The Air Force must step up efforts to enhance its image in the eyes of past, present, and future

military members. It is essential the Air Force broaden efforts to discover what makes the current generation "tick." This information would help determine the best course of action to attract youth to enlist in the Air Force and enhance the service's image in their eyes--a crucial step toward increasing propensity.

It is counter-productive to wait until potential recruits are 17 and 18 year-old juniors or seniors in high school, and then ask them if they would consider serving in the military. When the numbers that say "yes" are too low, the last resort is to lure new recruits with increased monetary offers and bonuses, hoping they will quickly join up so near term annual goals can be met. Shortly after missing the FY 1999 recruiting goal, "the President signed a \$289 billion defense bill that included a pay raise and other incentives, hoping to attract more recruits and keep today's troops in uniform longer."<sup>17</sup>

Beyond the issues of raising pay and benefits, a long-term strategy of expanding efforts to appeal to youth at an earlier stage is needed. One characteristic to note is they are not solely interested in money, "record numbers of high school and college students now perform volunteer community service."<sup>18</sup> There is only so much money that will ever be offered for military service. A better strategy would be an appeal to patriotism and service to country with more advertisements based on intrinsic values of serving in the Air Force. There is much merit in discovering what it takes to instill today's youth with the burning desire to serve rather than viewing enlistment as the last resort. Undoubtedly, focusing on youth characteristics is key to increasing their propensity to enlist. It is critical to develop long-term programs that will appeal to each new generation with strategies reaching far beyond finite

monetary pay and benefits toward infinite values that money just cannot buy.

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<sup>1</sup> Alphonso Maldon Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defense Force Management Policy, Memorandum, 1999 Youth Attitude Tracking Study, 11 January 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Air Force Goal Accession History, 3rd Wing Public Affairs, 14 October 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Susan G. Berkowitz et al., "An In-Depth Study of Military Propensity: Follow-Up Interviews with 1995 Youth Attitude Tracking Study Respondents," Defense Manpower Data Center, April 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Jerald Bachman et al., "Does Enlistment Propensity Predict Accession? High School Seniors' Plans and Behaviors", *Armed Forces & Society*, Fall 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Stoneman, "Beyond Rocking the Ages: an Interview with J. Walker Smith", *American Demographics*, May 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Analysis of the Echo Boomer Generation", USAF Public Affairs briefing, 24 February 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Chief Master Sergeants' Focus Group, Keesler AFB, Mississippi, conducted by author, 3 February 2000.

<sup>13</sup> SSgt Arnita McCoy-Dhamin, Recruiter, Jonesboro, Georgia, interviewed by author, 8 November 1999.

<sup>14</sup> MSgt Stephen Barrett, "Big Cities Challenge Service Recruiters", *American Forces Information Service*, on-line, Internet, August 1996, available from [http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Aug1996/n08271996\\_9608278.html](http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Aug1996/n08271996_9608278.html).

<sup>15</sup> Dave Moniz, "The Hollowing of America's Military", *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 August 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Robert Burns, "Pentagon Hoping Raise Will Lure, Keep Recruits", *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 15 October 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Stoneman, "Beyond Rocking the Ages: an Interview with J. Walker Smith", *American Demographics*, May 1998.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Propensity Survey Analysis**

This chapter reports the results of surveys conducted by this author. Data was collected from 497 respondents including: 1) airmen in basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas, and technical training at Keesler AFB, Mississippi (161); 2) company grade officers at Keesler AFB (18); 3) recruiters in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida (26); 4) military training instructors at Lackland AFB, Keesler AFB, and Georgia Institute of Technology (53); 5) college students at Clark Atlanta University and Georgia Tech, both located in Atlanta, Georgia, (61) and 6) high school students in Maryland and Texas (178). The surveys were individually designed for each group, approved 22 November 1999 by the Air Force Survey Office at Randolph AFB, Texas, and assigned Air Force Survey Control number USAF 99-97.

There were basic similarities among the survey instruments, but questions were customized appropriately for each group. All instruments included similar demographic questions. Names were optional, but all respondents were asked to provide their age, gender, education level, race, and city and state where they live. Respondents answered eleven basic questions phrased appropriately for each group. For example, question number one queries, "What are your plans...?" The airmen and company grade officers' question ended with "...after your initial service commitment," while the high school and college students' question ended with "...after graduation." Basic abbreviated questions were:



1. What are your plans?
2. How old were you when you began making career plans?
3. Who helped most in making your career decisions?
4. Did you know anyone in the military?
5. How do you think that person felt about their decision to join the military?
6. Have your parents ever served in the military? What branch?
7. Was there a base in your hometown? Did you ever visit it?
8. Would you recommend the Air Force to your friends and family members?
9. What is the main reason for your response to previous question?
10. Why did you join the Air Force?/ Would you consider joining the Air Force?
11. What should the Air Force do differently to recruit more people like you?

Instruments (Appendix A) were designed to take about five minutes to complete, but most groups took even less time to respond. Many respondents provided multiple responses to the questions concerning career plans, reasons for joining the Air Force, influencers, and recommendations to improve Air Force recruiting. For example, some respondents circled both “parents” and “friends” as their primary influencers or they circled “education” and “travel” as reasons for joining the Air Force. At the end of each survey respondents were asked to provide any additional comments and many took that option. Charts are provided for each group analysis and are located at Appendix B. This chapter will provide an analysis based on the survey data collected for each individual group. It will also take a look at the combined responses of the airmen and company grade officers, the newest Air Force members, to learn more about who influenced them, why they joined, and what they recommended to improve Air Force recruiting.

It should be noted that the data was analyzed based on gender for each question. The “no answer” category on each chart refers to respondents who did not provide their gender, but answered the survey question with that particular response. For example in reviewing Figure 2 concerning airmen plans, 20% of those

who planned a higher education did not indicate whether they were male or female. Additionally, at Figure 3 about 28% of the Airmen who said their parents influenced them, provided no response to the gender question on their survey form.

### **First Term Airmen**

Examining first-term airmen was valuable to this research because they were generally closer in age to the target group. Surveys were mailed to Lackland for the airmen in basic training, while all other airmen surveys were conducted in-person or during focus group sessions. Ages of the airmen ranged from under 18 to over 35 and 39% were males, 37% were females, with 24% providing no response to the gender question. After completing their initial service commitment, respondents said they would: go back to school for higher education (46%), get a civilian job (31%), reenlist (27%), or separate (4%). Over 59% of the airmen said they were 18-25 when they decided to join the Air Force. A major factor was who influenced the airmen. Based on their responses, parents (38) had the greatest influence on airmen's career decision followed by relatives (20%), friends (18%), advertisements (6%), and teachers (5%). An impressive 92% of the airmen knew a military person before they enlisted, but it is also interesting to note that 79% perceived the person felt they had made a good decision. When asked if their parents were ever in the military, 45% responded affirmatively with the greatest number of parents serving in the Army (47%), followed by the Air Force (28%), Marines (10%), and Navy (8%). The majority, 81% of airmen, would recommend the Air Force to their family and friends. Their top three reasons for recommending the Air Force include: the

military is a great way of life (24%), job skills (12%), great opportunities (11%), and good benefits (10%). Those who did not recommend the Air Force believed the military was not for everybody (6%) and the Air Force did not meet their expectations (6%). The airmen joined the Air Force for a variety of reasons with the top three being education benefits (76%), job skills (60%), and travel (46%). While they provided a wide range of recommendations to improve Air Force recruiting, 24% responded the Air Force should increase recruiter honesty and 15% indicated an increase in overall benefits would help the service recruit more members.

### **Company Grade Officers (CGOs)**

The company grade officer respondents were from Keesler AFB--Medical Group, Support Group, and Logistics Group. A highly interactive focus group was conducted during a Company Grade Officer's Council meeting. The young officers had all served 4 years or less and after their service commitments planned to make a career in the military (44%), stay a few more years (28%), or get out and get a civilian job (22%). Their career decisions were made at ages 18-25 (44%), 16-18 (33%), over 25 (17%) and 10-15 (6%). Advice from parents (39%) was the greatest influence in helping the CGOs make their decision to join the Air Force, followed by relatives (28%), friends (22%), teachers (6%), with 26% stating others. Responses included in "others" were generally "myself" or "no one". Before receiving their commission, 89% of the officers knew someone in the military and of those who knew someone, 75% perceived that the person felt they had made a good decision. Parents serving in the military may have laid a good foundation for their children's

career decision. Respondents indicated that 67% were carrying on the military tradition with parents in the Army (33%), Air Force (11%), and Navy (6%). Over 89% of the CGOs had a military base in their hometown and 38% of them had visited or lived on the base. In response to whether they would recommend the Air Force to their friends and family, 83% of the officers indicated they would “Definitely” or “Probably” recommend the service. Of those who would recommend the Air Force as an option to people they know, 28% said it was because the Air Force was a great place to start, while others said military life was great (22%) or the education opportunities (17%) were good. The CGOs’ reasons for non-recommending the Air Force included “military life is not for everyone” (6%), and the benefits were not good enough (6%). In response to why they joined the Air Force, the CGOs top three responses were patriotism (67%), leadership skills (67%), and education benefits (56%). The CGOs’ suggestions to improve the Air Force included increasing the benefits (28%), decreasing Operations tempo (17%), with 28% responding “other”. CGOs who responded “other”, provided a wide variety of suggestions for advertisement campaigns, training, and increased focus on individual areas of interest.

## **Recruiters**

Distribution of the recruiter surveys was made at a recruiter’s regional Commander’s Call. Recruiter surveys were designed with a dual purpose in mind. The first half of the survey asked them questions about potential recruits. The second half of the survey asked recruiters about themselves and their recruiting job.

Recruiter respondents were generally stationed in the southeast states including Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. All of the recruiters (100%) perceived most potential recruits planned to attend college after high school graduation.

Interestingly, 73% also believed that parents influenced most recruits. In response to "Why recruits join the Air Force?", recruiters felt that education (69%), travel (12%), job skills (31%), and salary (27%) were the top four reasons recruits enlisted. Concerning their own recruiting jobs, 46% of the recruiters said meeting quotas was the hardest thing about being a recruiter, followed by the fact that there were too many long hours (42%), and too few recruiters (19%). The recruiters said they personally joined the Air Force because of the education benefits (46%), to travel (31%), for job skills (31%) and for the salary (23%). To meet future recruiting goals, the recruiters believed the Air Force should increase the number of recruiters (27%), increase the benefits (23%), and provide more advertising (23%).

### **Military Training Instructors (MTIs)**

Respondents in the military training instructors' group were stationed at Keesler AFB, Mississippi; Lackland AFB, Texas; Georgia Institute of Technology and Clark Atlanta University, both in Atlanta, Georgia. Individual discussions were held with instructors at Keesler and Georgia Tech while the Lackland responses were received by mail. As with the recruiters, the first half of the MTIs questions pertained to trainees. The last half asked about the MTIs themselves. After trainees' first enlistment, 47% of the MTIs believed trainees' plan to separate, or go to college (32%). This group opined that parents (47%) and relatives (23%)

had the greatest influence on trainees' career decisions. In response to whether they would recommend the Air Force to their family and friends, 61% said they would "Definitely" or "Probably" recommend the Air Force. The top three reasons the MTIs joined the Air Force were job skills (55%), patriotism (47%), and education (42%).

### **College Students**

The majority of the college students were from Clark Atlanta and Georgia Tech. In conjunction with the survey, a discussion of this research was presented to the full corps of Georgia Tech and Clark Atlanta AFROTC students. The students were at all levels in the program from freshmen to seniors with 75% males, 20% females and 5% providing no gender response. After graduation from college, the students planned to join the military (81%) or go to graduate school (12%) with another 8% providing various other plans. Their responses indicated that 48% started planning their future at ages 16-18 while 25% said they began making future plans when they were 10-15 years old. Their major influencers were their parents (62%) and relatives (13%) with 21% stating other influencers. Respondents provided a wide variety of responses in the "other" category including "myself", "no one", or specific names of individuals. Among the college students, 97% said they knew a person in the military and of those, 92% perceived that the person felt they had made a good decision. Almost two-thirds of the college students (64%) responded that their parents had served in the military. Of those parents who served in the military 41% were in the Army, 41% were in the Air Force, 10% were in the Navy

and 3% were Marines. The college students responded that 98% of them would “Definitely” or “Probably” join the Air Force in the future. These college students believed the Air Force would attract more people to join if they would focus on more advertising (28%), increase the number of scholarships (23%) and increase pay and benefits (21%).

### **High School Students**

Surveys for the high school students were conducted at Surrattsville High School in Clinton, Maryland and at Mesquite High School in Mesquite, Texas. The respondents were members of Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC), Army JROTC, and non-JROTC students. The students ranged in age from 14 to 18 years and were 31% males and 49% females with 19% failing to answer the gender question. After graduation, 73% of these high school students said they planned to go to college, 15% planned to join the military, and 12% planned to get a civilian job. They said they began making plans for the future at age 10-15 (62%) or under 10 years (19%). Parents (56%), relatives (26%), and friends (21%) were the most influential in helping the students make decisions about their future. When asked specifically about their plans to attend college, 94% said “Definitely” or “Probably”. Over 43% of the students’ parents had served in the military. Of those, the parents served in the Air Force (31%), Army (29%), Marines (13%), and Navy (5%). Among the high school students, 78% indicated they knew a military person and 63% of those perceived the person felt they had made a good decision. The high school students did not provide enough specific responses to

analyze their recommendations to improve Air Force recruiting.

### **Active Duty Respondents (CGOs and Airmen)**

This group combines 175 survey responses received from the airmen and CGOs. When making career decisions, overall the young military members believed they were most influenced by parents (38%), relatives (21%), and 28% provided “other” responses. Those who responded “other” wrote in various responses including “no one”, “myself”, and individual names. The active duty respondents said they joined primarily because of education opportunities (74%), job skills (58%), and travel (46%). In response to “What should the Air Force do to improve recruiting?”, these CGOs and airmen believed the Air Force should place more emphasis on recruiting honesty (23%), increasing benefits (16%), and more advertising (12%), with 15% stating “other”.

### **Supplemental Information**

Additional information for this research was gathered through focus groups, in-person and telephone interviews, presentations, and numerous discussions with Air Force experts in personnel, accessions policy, recruiting, and advertising. Additionally, visiting Atlanta area recruiters and the staff at Atlanta MEPS at Fort Gilliam, provided insight pertinent to this study.

It should be noted this survey is not intended to be universally representative of any of the groups, but provided “grass roots” information for this research. It also provided primary data to supplement existing analysis for this study to determine



what attracts today's youth to the Air Force, who influences them most, and what they think the Air Force should do to increase the interest of potential recruits.

Further research is recommended in this area with expansion of a similar survey to nation-wide respondents. Meaningful survey results have the potential to keep the Air Force "in the loop" on current youth perceptions and subsequent measures the service can take to influence and increase future youth propensity to enlist.

## Chapter 4

### Current Air Force Approach

The Air Force has aggressively taken on the challenge to increase youth propensity and to meet recruiting goals. Leadership at the highest levels has resolved to improve recruiting and overcome existing barriers with several initiatives headlined at a recruiting summit. Additionally, the service is addressing recruiter concerns, increasing recruiter manpower, expanding Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) programs, focusing on advertising, and strongly advocating increased benefits and bonuses. This chapter will take a look at the Air Force's multifaceted approach toward winning their toughest recruitment battle ever.

Shortly after missing its FY 1999 recruiting goal, the Under Secretary of the Air Force and Vice Chief of Staff directed a summit be convened to take a hard look at Air Force recruiting. In October 1999, over 30 senior-level experts spent a total of seven days identifying realistic modifications that could be made to improve Air Force recruiting efficiency. Participants in this leading edge effort were charged to "leave no rock unturned" in their deliberations and to take a "broad, 'cradle to grave' approach."<sup>1</sup> Members of the summit developed "120 initiatives across a broad spectrum of recruiting and accession processes."<sup>2</sup> Their creative brainstorming laid the groundwork for subsequent recruiting roadmaps and set the pace for the Air Force's aggressive response to getting recruiting back on track.

The summit's initiatives ranged from overall Air Force image enhancements to incentives for recruiters and recruits. Specifically, the initiatives included 70 recruiting and advertising improvements, 15 recruiter incentives and 35 accession incentives. Most encouraging was the fact the initiatives were not set aside but acted upon almost immediately and were approved by AF senior leadership for staffing and program development by early Jan 2000. Moreover, currently, the SECAF staff is tracking the bi-weekly status of each initiative, including estimated completion dates and analysis.<sup>3</sup> A standing ovation is in order for the bona fide efforts thus far, and maximum support of the initiatives led by the Under Secretary of the Air Force and the Vice Chief of Staff.

To achieve success, following through on the summit's multifaceted strategies is very promising. One major area addressed, that has seen improvements already, is in taking care of Air Force recruiters. In previous years when recruiters were making their goals easily, Air Force recruiter manning levels were not considered as pressing issues. Recruiter manning is now at the forefront. Recruiters complained they were stretched thin with too many tasks and too little help. In an interview, Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Dan Robi, Chief, Enlisted Accessions Policy, confirmed that, "the other services' recruiters outnumbered ours by 13 to 1. We were operating with over three hundred below our authorized manning. Now, not only are we going to meet our authorized recruiter manning, but we've also gained approval for a plus-up of 300 authorizations."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to getting much needed manning assistance, the recruiters themselves will be incentivized. Rightfully so, among the prioritized top 18 initiatives from the summit are issues focusing on recruiters, including promotion and career enhancements, improved recruiter housing, upgraded office furnishings and equipment, and consideration of a recruiter service ribbon.<sup>5</sup> Recruiters are closest to the frontlines in the Air Force's efforts to bring in new recruits. Therefore, it is a solid investment to put more recruiters on the street, improve their quality of life, and institutionalize incentives and rewards for their success in one of the service's toughest jobs.

Second to staying attuned to recruiter needs, enticing youth toward long-term positive propensity to enlist is key to ensuring recruiter success. One of the most effective ways to lock in long-term interest in the Air Force is in building a positive image during a youth's early years. Junior ROTC exposes youth to the Air Force, and "...affords teenagers an opportunity to belong to a group that will build their self-confidence and help them become better people--better citizens."<sup>6</sup> As a result of senior leadership's push to give this program an even greater impact on youth, the Air Force has recently added "45 new units in high schools during fiscal [Year] 2000...AFJROTC will increase the number of units from 609 to 945 over the next six years."<sup>7</sup> Surveys have shown many of America's youth just do not know much about the Air Force, so increasing the number of AFJROTC units is a promising endeavor that will pay great dividends for the long-term. The Air Force image, as seen by an AFJROTC cadet, will certainly contribute to the positive aspects of citizenship, leadership, and ultimately service to one's country.

There is no doubt Air Force image is a major issue. One of the greatest efforts to enhance the service's image is through advertising. As discussed in Chapter One, paid advertising is a new concept for the Air Force, but this requirement was a must to successfully compete for the recruits needed annually. "This year another milestone is being passed as the Air Force budgets for prime time television advertisements for the first time in history."<sup>8</sup> The Air Force is up to the challenge of the competition, General Lyles, Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, confirmed, "We are investing millions of dollars in recruiting and retention...Last year we put \$78 million in advertising and we're going to have about \$60 million every year from now on to try to get the message across and to try to get people to understand the importance, the vitality, the greatness of the United States Air Force in order to get people to come into our great ranks."<sup>9</sup> Advertising is a major Air Force step towards appealing to more potential recruits and attracting more positive attention of their primary influencers, namely, parents, and counselors.

A major foundation for all of the other initiatives was the triumph in increasing pay, expanding enlistment bonus programs, and investing in a college loan repayment program. It is a given that economics is driving much of the competition, thus the need to improve pay and benefits is apparent. January 2000 saw an increase of 4.5 percent in military pay with another targeted raise coming in July 2000. Undoubtedly, this was a welcomed plus for active duty members and a great selling point for recruiters. Competition for today's high tech generation is tough since corporations also need their manpower and skills. Consequently, increasing enlistment bonuses is a near term strategy with potential to attract

youth attention. Lieutenant General Donald L. Peterson, Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, announced that several steps in the monetary bonus arena are being taken, including "expanding the Enlistment Bonus Program to include 1,000 skills and increasing the maximum bonus amount to \$12,000 for some six-year enlistments...Targeting individuals with a mechanical aptitude index of 44 or higher to receive a \$3,000 bonus for a four-year enlistment...Authorizing an additional \$1,000 bonus for recruits who opt to enter service during February through May, which are historically difficult months for recruiting."<sup>10</sup>

The Air Force deserves high praise for its monumental efforts to confront recruiting hurdles by surmounting them with realistic approaches. Conducting the recruiting summit got the ball rolling smartly in the right direction with 120 creative ideas generated by experts taking a hard look at what the Air Force could do to improve chances of meeting future recruiting goals. Recruiters are already reaping the benefits of the prioritized initiatives that will lessen their workload, improve their quality of life, and reward them. Additionally, recruits will be more likely to respond to more opportunities to get acquainted with the Air Force through JROTC units and increased advertising. Finally, the Air Force has supported higher enlistment bonuses that may step up the competition for quality recruits in a highly competitive and booming economic environment. Indications are the Air Force's results oriented initiatives will be closely monitored to ensure prompt implementation.

Capitalizing on these efforts and supplementing them with additional periodic summits should be the next step. Answering the challenge of long-term recruiting

is certain to be an on-going process requiring consistent review and update.

Flexible and forward looking senior leadership hold the key to the Air Force's ability to accept changes continuously and to promptly address the ever-changing needs of each new generation. Leadership has taken a positive approach that is certain to lead the Air Force back to its position as "service of choice" during this millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> Lt Col Steven Wagoner, HQ USAF/DPFP, briefing to Dr. Hamre, Deputy Secretary of Defense, 24 January 2000, subject: Air Force Recruiting.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of the Air Force Staff Group Tasker for Under SECAF DiBattiste and USAF Vice Chief of Staff General Lyles, 29 December 1999, subject: Taskers from Under and CV on Recruiting.

<sup>4</sup> CMSgt Danny J. Robi, Chief, Enlisted Accession Policy, HQ USAF/DPFPA, interviewed by author, 2 March 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Recruiting Initiative Prioritization, Attachment to Staff Summary Sheet, 13 January 2000, subject: Taskers from Under and CV on Recruiting.

<sup>6</sup> Office of Public Affairs, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, "Air Force JROTC Expands, Seeks Instructors", *Air Force News Release*, 3 February 2000, on-line, Internet, 24 February 2000, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223\\_000272.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223_000272.html).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., [http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223\\_000272.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223_000272.html).

<sup>8</sup> Office of Public Affairs, HQ USAF, "CMSAF Cites Key Concerns Before Committee", *Air Force News Release*, 23 February 2000, on-line, Internet, 24 February 2000, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223\\_000266.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223_000266.html).

<sup>9</sup> Office of Public Affairs, Space and Missile Systems Center, "Vice CSAF Explains Service's New Mindset", *Air Force News Release*, 23 February 2000, on-line, Internet, 24 February 2000, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223\\_000263.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000223_000263.html).

<sup>10</sup> Office of Public Affairs, HQ USAF, "Recruiting, Retention Obstacles Addressed Before Congress", 1 March 2000, on-line, Internet, 2 March 2000, available from <https://www.af.mil/newspaper/v2n8s7.html>.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Options to Enhance Youth Propensity**

Since missing the FY 1999 recruiting goal, Air Force leadership has set recruiting as its number one priority. The recruiting summit set the pace for an aggressive movement toward efforts to alleviate future recruiting shortfalls. Over 120 initiatives resulting from the summit are in various stages of implementation, with 18 initiatives considered "top priority" by Air Force Undersecretary DiBattiste and Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, General Lyles.<sup>1</sup> The top priorities concern recruit, recruiter, and enhanced enlistment bonuses. Hopefully, leadership's monumental efforts will be rewarded with an increased number of Air Force recruits for FY 2000. Meeting FY 2000 goals would be impressive, but what about FY 2001, 2002 and beyond? This chapter will recommend options that will have a positive impact on propensity to enlist in the Air Force--not just for next year, but far into the out-years of the 2000s.

Paid TV advertisements are now, and are likely to remain, the most significant new Air Force recruiting tool. "Advertising helps us create an image out there with a massive reach. It's cost effective. We're able to get the message to a lot of people and a lot cheaper than sending a recruiter to visit homes."<sup>2</sup> Currently, the Air Force is targeting young adults age 15-22.<sup>3</sup> For long-term success, Air Force advertising should also focus on youth in elementary and junior high school, ages 7-14--before they begin to make career decisions. If positive images of the Air Force are formed



with the youth at earlier ages, those images can be built upon throughout the years and are more likely to become lasting impressions. Leadership must increase advertising focused on developing lasting impressions for even younger age groups. This strategy will increase long-term propensity to enlist as youth mature to recruitable ages.

Currently, the total budget for advertising is \$61.8 million. It covers brochures, handouts and other freebies, but the major expenditures are for television advertisements--not radio.<sup>4</sup> In addition to television advertisements, the Air Force should also consider developing paid radio commercials to capture the attention of youth and adults. Radio ads can be designed to appeal to parents and other influencers during their morning and evening commutes to and from work. Likewise, many youth wake up each morning to their favorite radio announcers and continue listening as they get ready for school. Air Force should create radio ads with youth appeal to be aired during those morning listening hours. Supplementing television advertisements with strategically placed radio ads to target both youth and adults would be a wise Air Force pursuit.

Another related strategy would be taking advantage of the computer and video market that is becoming a major pass time for teens. The Air Force should consider developing and distributing video game software with an Air Force theme. In conjunction with the firmly established Air Force link Internet site, expanding the number of Internet sites and banners may attract the attention of more teens and their influencers. One Internet site for college scholarships has Navy ads all over it—why not introduce web surfers to the Air Force at scholarship web sites. Many

college bound teens may consider joining the Air Force if they are convinced they can continue to achieve their educational goals during or after service. Developing video game software and increasing the number of banners and web sites has great potential to expose more youth and their influencers to the opportunities offered by the Air Force.

Survey analysis for this study supports the notion that youth propensity may be directly related to the advice and positive recommendations of primary influencers. It follows that advertisements should specifically target parents, counselors, and others who play a major role in this generation's decision making process. Influencers' support is needed since they can advise today's youth to consider the Air Force as a positive career alternative. Creating Air Force advertisements that inform and appeal to moms, dads, and other youth advisors, especially those who have no military experience, would aid in bridging the gap between military and civilians. The Air Force must place greater emphasis on gaining influencers' confidence in the service as a great first step into adulthood for today's youth. To move forward in developing long-term propensity to enlist, radio and TV advertising campaigns should create an earlier positive Air Force image with America's youth. Then to preserve that image, campaigns should begin to focus on the primary influencers.

In conjunction with developing advertisements that will appeal to younger individuals and their influencers, the Air Force should address its overall appeal strategy. While annually announcing bigger and better enlistment bonuses and other benefits to attract youth to enlist in the short-term, the long-term appeal

should focus on service to country, patriotism, and other intrinsic values associated with military service. Pay may seem to be a motivator on the surface, but many say, "it's a sense of belonging to a quality organization that appeals to most."<sup>5</sup> Although pay and benefits are important, they can not continue to be the main focus in getting young people to serve their country. An *Air Force Times* article appropriately asked "Why We Have to 'Buy' Air Force Recruits."<sup>6</sup> The Air Force is already giving up to \$13,000 in bonuses and if money continues to be the major factor, the American public will quickly lose its ability to pay for its voluntary system. Furthermore, Air Education and Training Command says that it costs over \$5,400 to enlist each new recruit.<sup>7</sup> While this paper certainly does not advocate giving up on the all-volunteer service, it does give pause to considering the merits of stressing patriotism and service to country rather than enlistment bonuses. Adhering to this strategy while addressing JROTC cadets, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen questioned, "How do we attract you?"<sup>8</sup> To increase youth propensity to enlist, "the military has to appeal to aspirations beyond the desire for a good job. The services have to attract those who want to contribute to the welfare of others as they protect the country and, at the same time, have a great experience traveling the world."<sup>9</sup> Defending our nation is a big deal, and there will never be enough money in the budget to fully compensate military people for the tasks they perform. Professional ad campaigns must spend more time stressing the intrinsic values along with all of the other great reasons to join the Air Force.

Another long-term strategy would capitalize on expanding a great idea that's already in place. The "Air Force Experience" is a traveling display featuring an

F-16 Falcon and flight simulators, a briefing room, and interactive kiosks. The mobile display will visit thirty cities and will expose thousands to the opportunities available in the Air Force.<sup>10</sup> Reportedly, the Air Force spent "\$5.5 million for this high-tech road show designed to catch the eye of young people".<sup>11</sup> Taking advantage of the basic idea that is already in place, the Air Force should take it a step further and design less expensive, condensed versions of the "Experience." Every Air Force base should create and sponsor an "AF Experience" van for use in the surrounding communities. The van would be used to ferry information to local schools, public events, and even participate in local parades. Based on a bookmobile concept, where books were transported to neighborhoods who had limited access to libraries, drivers would provide civilian neighbors with briefings, videotapes, posters, and brochures on the vast opportunities offered by the Air Force. The vans could also be used to provide base tours to small groups, such as school principals, counselors, or teachers. Additionally, the vans, manned by young Air Force members, could serve as static displays in local malls which have become popular meeting places and are often frequented by youth in the area. Young airmen would more likely attract the attention of young people in the mall, engage with them, and share their excitement about Air Force life. Implementing a cost-effective, smaller, more compact version of the "AF Experience" would significantly expand opportunities to tell the Air Force story to a much wider audience.

Another way to assist recruiters in their outreach efforts would be the institution of a daily or weekly base tour program at every Air Force base. To increase military connectivity to civilian communities, the Air Force should

institutionalize tour programs and provide more opportunities to showcase the missions and uniqueness of each Air Force base.<sup>12</sup> Currently, many bases provide tours to specialized groups, civic leaders, or other distinguished visitors. Yet, members of the general public are not enticed to visit the base except during annual open-house programs. Regularly scheduled tours would increase exposure of the Air Force to local citizens on a regular basis--not just once a year, but every day or at least weekly. Inviting the public in to tour base facilities, receive unclassified mission briefings, and maybe even a pay-as-you-go meal in the dining facility, would help decrease civilian misperceptions firsthand while enhancing the Air Force image. Imagine the impact of this type of visit on a group of elementary or junior high school students, principals, teachers, and parents who have no knowledge of the Air Force or what it does. Active duty volunteers could be organized and trained through the Public Affairs office. Costs would be minor, perhaps a few man-hours and a vehicle--with a tremendous payback. A base tour program, coupled with enthusiastic young airmen or officers, would help narrow the gap and build positive rapport between the local civilian communities and their military counterparts inside the main gates.

Along with bringing the civilians to the Air Force, the Air Force must also go to them. Since long-term propensity is so evasive, to kick start positive AF images military members, both active duty and retired, should play a larger role in mentoring youth in the civilian communities. Teachers are always in need of assistance and uniformed Air Force members would be excellent assistants. Regularly scheduled visits to local schools by active duty or retired members would

be impressive to the young students. Whether tutoring, helping with a sports team, or making presentations to classes, building a rapport with the youth is key to building trust and confidence with the administration and the students. Recruiters are responsible for getting recruits on board and meeting annual goals. To develop long-term positive impressions, however, active duty and retired mentors would have a major impact on establishing relationships with youth before they are actually recruit eligible.

Another related strategy would be sponsoring scholarships and increasing Air Force visibility at private high schools and academies that concentrate on math, science, and technology curriculums.<sup>13</sup> Today's Air Force is a high-tech service and the future undoubtedly holds even more complex technology-oriented missions. Inevitably, tomorrow's Air Force will need recruits with the capability to learn these high-tech skills. Why leave it to chance? The Air Force can make it happen with early identification of high quality students and selectively investing in their education. Scholarship recipients would be assigned an active duty mentor, be given summer internships at the nearest base, and would be more likely to feel committed to the Air Force upon graduation. Investing in this method of early sponsorship is focused on fostering strong bonds of early commitment to the Air Force with parents and students. If propensity to enlist was based on youth impressions of the service, this would be a bona fide way to develop positive images of the Air Force and increase the likelihood of quality youth enlistment. This strategy is not without costs and would likely require Congressional approval. Yet, it is a worthwhile pursuit to systematically get the smart kids early, mentor them

on a regular basis, and proactively affect increased propensity to enlist in the Air Force.

Increasing propensity to enlist also depends upon knowing exactly what appeals to each generation of youth. Currently, Air Force leadership generally relies upon annual DoD YATS surveys to gather data on propensity. Given the immense competition in today's environment, the Air Force should develop its own annual Air Force Youth Attitudes Study (AF YATS). First, the study would concentrate solely on Air Force and not just general military propensity. Second, it is likely the survey would generate interest in the Air Force merely because it is being conducted, and may bring the service to light for many youth who have never considered it. Next, conducting the survey may generate the interest of parents and other influencers by motivating them to get more information about the Air Force and its career opportunities for the high school graduates they know. Finally, the survey could be designed to inform respondents, while gathering important data concerning: their knowledge and impression of the Air Force mission; future career goals; Air Force benefits; and dynamic youth attitudes, including appeal and influence factors. In contrast to the YATS high school survey, the AF YATS should also survey elementary and junior high school respondents. The resulting data would provide early indications of where the Air Force needs to place greater emphasis or increased visibility. Providing additional information to the youth who show interest could make follow-up contact. Staying in touch with these youth periodically would be productive in helping nurture and maintain their interest in the Air Force as they mature to become potential recruits.

In conjunction with identifying potential enlistees, the annual AF YATS would gather valuable information on youth attitudes and what motivates them. Future advertising campaigns, brochures, and recruiting programs could be adjusted to appeal to youth based on annual survey data. The AF YATS would also help determine regional youth attitude differences and allow flexibility for targeting Air Force recruiting campaigns based on the youth in each region. Implementation of an AF YATS would keep the Air Force in touch with changing youth attitudes while gathering data that may provide the key to enhanced recruiting programs.

“Senior [Air Force] leadership made the decision that we need to have a greater impact across the nation.”<sup>14</sup> They have already shown their willingness to look “outside of the box” for recruiting solutions. Considering the many initiatives from its recruiting summit, the Air Force is well on its way to improving recruiting programs and moving closer to annual goals. Yet, long-term propensity is the basic foundation for continuous recruiting success. Air Force leadership should carefully consider the long-term strategies discussed in this chapter as they may be key to building a solid platform for enhancing future youth propensity trends.

As expected, each of these proposals will require resources, but this should not discourage the Air Force from implementing them. Congress is fully aware of the competitive environment the military currently faces. In fact, statements have proclaimed, “If the civilian job market continues to be as strong as it has been, the Department of Defense (DoD) may indeed have to devote considerably more resources to attracting and retaining a high-quality force.”<sup>15</sup> Leadership must continue informing Congress of the need for increased resources to implement



programs focused on enticing quality youth to join the Air Force for years to come.

Leadership recognition of the significance of posturing the service to meet long-term recruiting goals will ensure its future success in attracting and maintaining Air Force appeal as the "service of choice." Recruiters are tasked with a tough job in an even tougher competitive environment. They need help. Air Force leadership must continue moving forward in implementing programs designed to enhance recruiter success. Open-minded consideration and approval of even one of the options presented has the potential to increase long-term propensity and perpetually motivate more of America's youth to serve throughout this millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel Steve Wagoner, Chief, Accessions Policy, HQ USAF/DPFP, interviewed by author, 24 January 2000.

<sup>2</sup> American Forces Press Service, "Recruitment Ad: New Strategies, New Messages", *American Forces Information Service*, on-line, Internet, 6 March 2000, available from [http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Mar1999/n03311999\\_9903313.html](http://www.defenselink.mil:80/news/Mar1999/n03311999_9903313.html).

<sup>3</sup> Brig Gen Peter Sutton, Commander, Air Force Recruiting Service, briefing, 13 December 1999, subject: The Air Force Recruiting Process "Boy Am I Enthusiastic".

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Tim Talbert, Director of Advertising, Air Force Recruiting Service, interviewed by author, 16 March 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Office of Public Affairs, "Undersecretary DiBattiste Pulls No Punches During Spangdahlem Visit", *News Release 99-10-22*, (Spangdahlem AB, Germany: 52nd Fighter Wing Public Affairs).

<sup>6</sup> Robert F. Dorr, "Let's Figure Out Why We Have to 'Buy' Air Force Recruits", *Air Force Times*, 17 January 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Robert F. Dorr, "To Mend Recruiting, We Must Relate Service to Citizenship", *Air Force Times*, 8 November 1999.

<sup>8</sup> American Forces Press Service, "Cohen, NBA Stars Swap 'War Stories'", 9 March 2000, on-line, Internet, 10 March 2000, available from [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2000/n03062000\\_20003061.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2000/n03062000_20003061.html).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2000/n0306200\\_20003061.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2000/n0306200_20003061.html).

<sup>10</sup> Office of Public Affairs, "Air Force Recruiting Gives America 'The Experience'", *News Release, 00-01-27*, (Randolph AFB, TX: Air Force Recruiting Service, January 2000).

<sup>11</sup> "Air Force Hopes New Logo Will Help Recruiting Soar", *San Antonio Express-News*, 3 February 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Colonel Dale Vande Hey, Director of Personnel, HQ PACAF/DP, interviewed by author, February 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Lt Col Tommie Thomas, Military Assistant to Deputy Assistant SECAF for Manpower, interviewed by author, 24 January 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Office of Public Affairs, 11th Wing, Washington D.C., "Personnel Director Focuses on People Issues", *Air Force News Release, 7 January 2000*, on-line, Internet, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Jan2000/n20000107\\_000022.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Jan2000/n20000107_000022.html).

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Jehn, Assistant Director, National Security Division, Congressional Budget Office, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Armed Services US Senate, subject: Military Pay and Benefits, 3 March 1999.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

Recruiting is one of the Air Force's top priorities. During his visit to Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, in March 2000, Lieutenant General Donald Petersen, USAF Director of Personnel, stated, "We are the best Air Force in the world; we are strained, stressed, and tired, but not broken."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Air Force is not broken and continues to be the most powerful Air Force in the world. Why? Because it is a service with leadership that is willing to call a spade a spade and answer the call to meet the toughest challenges head on. Today, recruiting is one of its toughest challenges.

The Air Force has responded strategically with enlistment bonuses, paid television advertisements, and recruiter incentives. For the FY 2001 budget, the Air Force's top item on the unfunded priority list is about \$61 million for recruitment and retention initiatives.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives are focused on boosting the number of future recruits. These recruiting problems call to mind the words of a past Support Group Commander and mentor who always advised his squadron commanders, "to find the solution you just gotta keep peeling the onion."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the Air Force must continue its efforts to reach the core of its recruiting complexities. It must stay abreast of dynamic youth issues, attitudes, and behaviors. Seeking funds annually to increase enlistment bonuses may lose its effect in achieving immediate and long-term recruiting goals. Civilian competitors can give bonuses, and they have latitude and flexibility that does not require

congressional approval.

Money, benefits, and bonuses can not continue to take precedence in advertisements designed to attract America's youth to join the Air Force. "What must be restored in the United States is the concept of service to the nation. With all-volunteer services, the nation's youth have no sense that they are expected to "give back" to their country."<sup>4</sup> Staying in touch with the youth and building a rapport with them early, before they begin making future plans may earn a higher number of positive considerations to join the Air Force. Pride, patriotism, and service to country are values no amount of money can buy--they must be instilled. The Air Force must take an active role in bringing values back to the forefront and reminding America about the virtues and qualities military service can develop in its youth.

Recommended options presented in this paper have the potential to take the Air Force beyond the "pay for services rendered" strategies and help instill youth with a "burning desire" to be a part of the Air Force family and play a role in keeping our country strong. The Air Force must make it a priority to focus on increasing youth propensity by developing a service-specific youth attitude survey. Leadership must also increase emphasis on factors that are within its control by gaining the confidence of influencers, closing the gap between military and civilians, targeting youth at earlier ages, and emphasizing intrinsic values realized by those who serve.

Air Force leadership has moved forward smartly by developing over 120 strategic initiatives to address today's recruiting challenges. But to ensure they continue meeting tomorrow's recruiting goals; it is imperative Air Force leadership pursues development of long-term while continuing to "peeling that onion."

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<sup>1</sup>Office of Public Affairs, 374th Airlift Wing, Yokota Air Base, Japan, "Air Force Director of Personnel Lends Insight to Career Futures", *Air Force News, Released 11 February 2000*, on-line, Internet, available from [http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000211\\_000199.html](http://www.af.mil/news/Feb2000/n20000211_000199.html).

<sup>2</sup>Frank Wolfe, "Air Force Unfunded Priority List Contains Modernization Needs", *Defense Daily*, 15 February 2000.

<sup>3</sup>Colonel Dale Vande Hey, Director of Personnel, HQ PACAF, quoted from discussions with author at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska.

<sup>4</sup>"Study On Military Sounds a Warning", *San Antonio Express-News*, 15 January 2000.

## **Appendix A**

### **Survey Instruments**

**Propensity Survey  
(First Term Airmen)**

Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best applies to you or by providing your written response in the space provided. Some questions will ask you to circle all responses that apply. (This survey only takes about 5 minutes to complete)

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 18 or under   19-28   29-35   Over 35   Gender: Male   Female

Education Level: GED   High School   Some College   Bachelors   Some Graduate work   Masters Degree

Race/Ethnic Origin: Caucasian   African American   Hispanic   Asian American   Other \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown City and State: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are your plans after completing your initial service commitment? (circle all that apply)

Reenlist   Separate   Get a civilian job   Higher education   Don't know   Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. About how old were you when you decided to join the Air Force?

under 10   10-15   16-18   18-25   over 25

3. Who helped you the most in making the decision to join the Air Force?

Parents   Relatives   Teachers   Friends   Spouse   Advertisements   Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Before enlisting, did you know anyone that served in the military?   Yes   No

5. If you knew a person in the military, how did they feel about their decision to join?

Made a good choice   Didn't make a good choice   Never talked about it   Didn't know military

6. Have your parents ever served in the military?   Yes   No   If yes, what Branch? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Was there a military base in your town? Yes/No   If yes, did you ever visit it? Yes/No

8. Would you recommend joining the Air Force to your friends and family members?

Definitely   Probably   Probably not   Definitely not

9. What is the main reason for your response to question 8 above? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Why did you join the Air Force? (circle all that apply)

Prestige   Patriotism   Salary   Job skills   Leadership   Education opportunities   Travel  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. What should the Air Force do differently, if we want to recruit more people like you?

Please write any additional comments on the back of this survey/GOOD LUCK in achieving your future goals

**Propensity Survey  
(Company Grade Officers)**

Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best applies to you or by providing your written response in the space provided. Some questions will ask you to circle all responses that apply. (This survey only takes about 5 minutes to complete)

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 22 or under   23-28   29-35   Over 35   Gender: Male   Female

Your Education Level: Bachelors   Some Graduate work   Graduate Degree   Higher

Race/Ethnic Origin: Caucasian   African American   Hispanic   Asian American   Other \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown City and State: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What are your plans after completing your initial service commitment? (circle all that apply)

Stay and make it a career   Stay a few more years   Get a civilian job   Higher education   Don't know   Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. About how old were you when you decided to join the Air Force? (circle all that apply)

under 10   10-15   16-18   18-25   over 25

3. Who helped you the most in making the decision to join the Air Force? (circle all that apply)

Parents   Relatives   Teachers   Friends   Spouse   Advertisements   Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Before your commissioning program, did you know anyone that served in the military?   Yes   No

5. If you knew a person in the military, how did they feel about their decision to join?

Made a good choice   Didn't make a good choice   Never talked about it   I didn't know any military people

6. Have your parents ever served in the military?   Yes   No   If yes, what branch? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Was there a military base in your state?   Yes   No   If yes, did you ever visit it?   Yes   No

8. Would you recommend joining the Air Force to your friends and family members?

Definitely   Probably   Probably not   Definitely not

9. What is the main reason for your response to question 8 above? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Why did you join the Air Force? (circle all that apply)

Prestige   Patriotism   Salary   Job skills   Leadership skills   Educational opportunities   Travel   Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. What should the Air Force do differently, if we want to recruit more people like you? \_\_\_\_\_

Please write any additional comments on the back of this survey/GOOD LUCK in achieving your future goals



## Propensity Survey (Recruiters)

Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best applies to you or by providing your written response in the space provided. Some questions will ask you to circle all responses that apply. (This survey only takes about 5 minutes to complete)

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 18-25   26-35   Over 35   Gender: Male   Female

Your Education Level: GED   High school   Some College   Bachelors   Masters   Other \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnic Origin: Caucasian   African American   Hispanic   Other \_\_\_\_\_

City and State: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do most potential recruits say they plan to do after high school?

College   Trade school   Civilian job   Join military   They don't know   Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. In your opinion, who generally helps potential recruits make the decision to enlist?

(circle all that apply) Parents   Relatives   Teachers   Friends   Spouses   TV/Radio Ads   Others \_\_\_\_\_

3. Generally, how many recruits know someone in the military? Most   Some   Very few   None

4. Why do recruits join the Air Force? (circle all that apply)

Prestige   Patriotism   Salary   Job skills   Leadership   Travel   Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Did you meet your personal recruiting goal this year? Yes   No

6. In your opinion, what was the main reason for your Yes or No response to question 5?

7. What is the hardest thing about being a recruiter?

Long hours   Isolated location   Not enough of us   Meeting quotas   Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many miles away from your office is the nearest Air Force Base?

Less than 20 miles   20-50 miles   50-100 miles   over 100 miles

9. Do you ever take potential recruits to the base? Always   Sometimes   Never

10. Have your parents ever served in the military? Yes   No   If yes, what branch? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Why did you join the Air Force? (circle all that apply)

Prestige   Patriotism   Salary   Job skills   Leadership   Travel   Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. What should the Air Force do differently, if they want to meet future recruiting goals? \_\_\_\_\_

Please write any additional comments on the back of this survey/GOOD LUCK in achieving your future goals

**Propensity Survey  
(Military Training Instructors)**

Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best applies to you or by providing your written response in the space provide. Some questions will ask you to circle all responses that apply. (This survey only takes about 5 minutes)

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 18 or under 19-28 29-35 over 35 Gender: Male Female

Education Level? High School Some College Bachelors Some Graduate Work Masters Higher

Race/Ethnic Origin: Caucasian African American Hispanic Asian American Other \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown City/State: \_\_\_\_\_

1. In your opinion, what do most students plan to do at the end of their active duty service commitment?  
(circle all that apply)

Stay in or reenlist Separate Seek higher education Seek civilian job Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Based on your judgement, who influenced students most in their decision to join the Air Force?

Parents Relatives Teachers Friends Spouses Advertisements Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. How do most students feel about their decision to join the Air Force?

Pleased with their decision Not pleased with their decision Don't Know

4. In your opinion, what is the most common area of dissatisfaction for your students?

Low pay Difficult job Long hours Miss the family Recruiter dishonesty Other \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions concern you—please respond based on your personal experience.

5. About how old were you when you made the decision to join the Air Force?

Under 10 10-15 16-18 18-25 Over 25 Don't remember

6. Would you recommend today's Air Force to your friends or family members?

Definitely Probably Probably not Definitely not

7. What is the main reason for your response to the previous question number 6 above?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Have your parents ever served in the military? Yes No If yes, what Branch? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Why did you join the Air Force? (Circle all that apply)

Prestige Patriotism Salary Job skills Leadership Educational Opportunities Travel Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. What should the Air Force do differently, if we want to meet future recruiting goals?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please write any additional comments on the back of this survey/ Good Luck in achieving your future goals!

## Propensity Survey (College Students)

Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best applies to you or by providing your written response in the space provided. Some questions will ask you to circle all responses that apply. (This survey only takes about 5 minutes to complete)

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 17 or under   18-23   23-28   29-35   Over 35   Gender: Male   Female

Your Education Level: Freshman   Sophomore   Junior   Senior   Graduate School

Race/Ethnic Origin: Caucasian   African American   Hispanic   Other \_\_\_\_\_

City and State: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. What do you plan to do after you finish college?**

Graduate school   Civilian job   Join military   Don't know   Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. About how old were you when you started planning for your future?**

under 10   10-15   16-18   18-25   over 25   haven't made plans yet

**3. Who helps you the most in making decisions about your future?**

Parents   Relatives   Teachers   Friends   Advertisements   Other \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Do you know anyone that served in the military?   Yes   No**

**5. If you know a person in the military, how did they feel about their decision to join?**

Made a good choice   Didn't make a good choice   Never talked about it   I don't know any military people

**6. Have your parents ever served in the military?   Yes   No   If yes, what branch? \_\_\_\_\_**

**7. How much do you know about the Air Force Officers Corps?**

A lot   Some   A little   Nothing

**8. Is there a military base in your state?   Yes   No   If yes, have you ever visited it?   Yes   No**

**9. Would you consider joining the Air Force in the future?**

Definitely   Probably   Probably not   Definitely not

**10. What is the main reason for your response to question 9 above? \_\_\_\_\_**

**11. What should the Air Force do differently, if they want people like you to join? \_\_\_\_\_**

Please write any additional comments on the back of this survey/GOOD LUCK in achieving your future goals

**Propensity Survey  
(High School Students)**

Please answer the following questions by circling the response that best applies to you or by providing your written response in the space provided. Some questions will ask you to circle all responses that apply. (This survey only takes about 5 minutes to complete)

Name (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 14 or under   15   16   17   18   over 18   Gender: Male   Female

Your Grade: 9th   10th   11th   12th

Race/Ethnic Origin: Caucasian   African American   Hispanic   Other \_\_\_\_\_

City and State: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you plan to do after you finish high school?  
Attend College   Attend Trade School   Get a job   Join the military   Don't know   Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. About how old were you when you started planning for your future?  
under 10   10-15   16-18   over 18   haven't made plans yet
3. Who helps you the most in making decisions about your future?  
Parents   Relatives   Teachers   Friends   Advertisements   Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you plan to go to college?  
Definitely   Probably   Probably not   Definitely not
5. Have your parents ever served in the military? Yes No If yes, what branch? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Other than your parents, do you know anyone else in the military? Yes No
7. If you know a person in the military, how did they feel about their decision to join the military?  
Made a good choice   Didn't make a good choice   Never talked about it   I don't know any military people
8. Is there a military base in your state? Yes No If yes, have you ever visited it? Yes No
9. Would you consider joining the Air Force in the future?  
Definitely   Probably   Probably not   Definitely not
10. What is the main reason for your response to question 9 above? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What should the Air Force do differently, if they want people like you to join? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please write any additional comments on the back of this survey/GOOD LUCK in achieving your future goals

## **Appendix B**

### **Supplemental Charts**

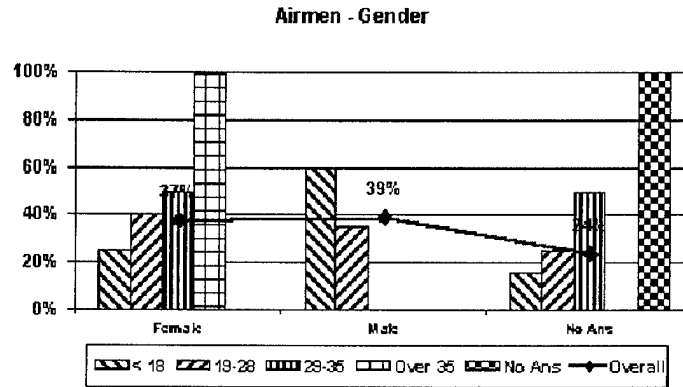


Figure 1. Airmen - Gender by Age

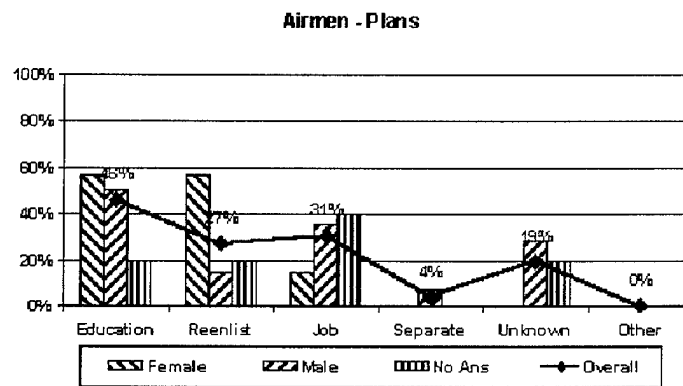


Figure 2. Airmen - What Are Your Plans After Your Initial Service Commitment

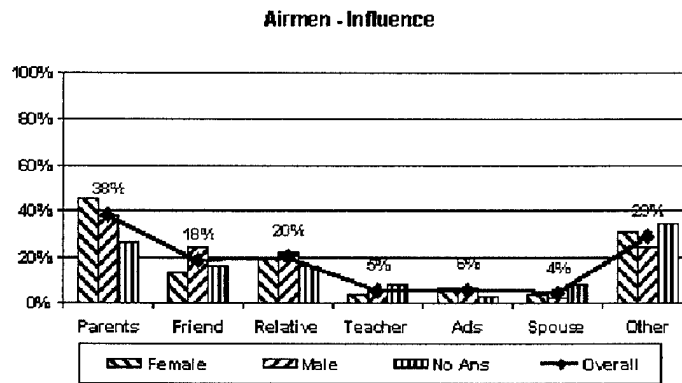
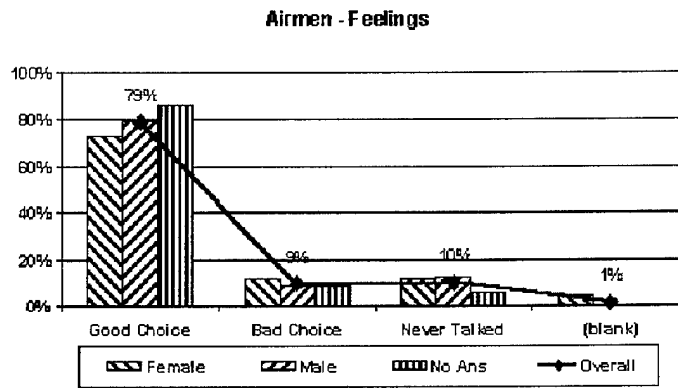
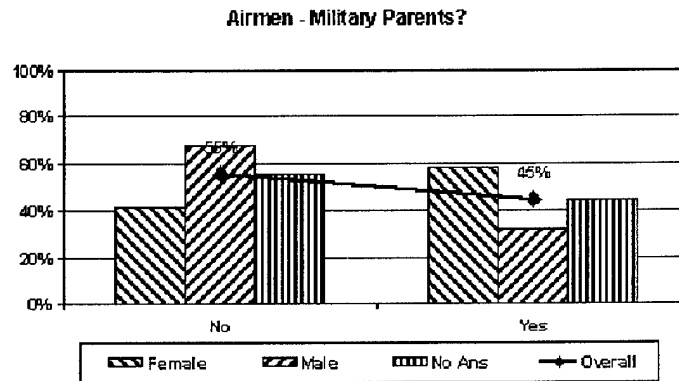


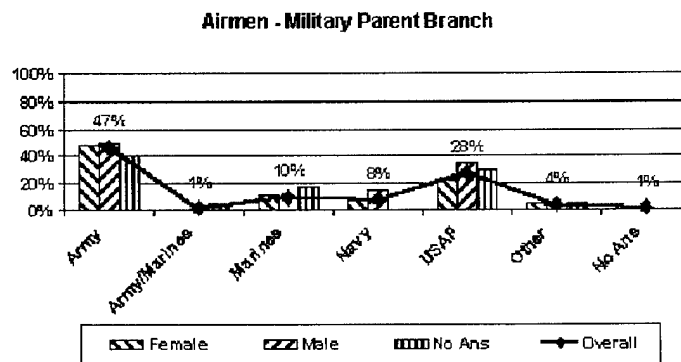
Figure 3. Airmen - Who Helped Most in Making the Decision to Join the Air Force



**Figure 4.** Airmen – How Did the Military Person You Knew Feel About Their Decision to Join



**Figure 5.** Airmen – Have Your Parents Ever Served in the Military



**Figure 6.** Airmen – If Your Parents Served in the Military, Which Branch

### Airmen - Recommend?

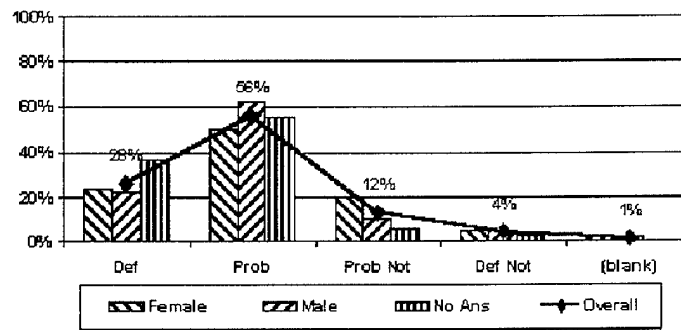


Figure 7. Airmen - Would You Recommend the Air Force to Your Friends and Family

### Airmen - Why Recommend?

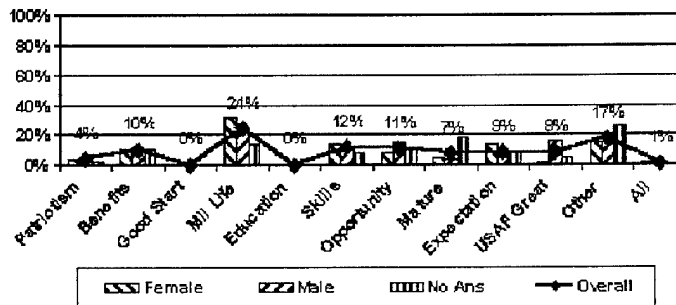


Figure 8. Airmen - Why Would You Recommend the Air Force

### Airmen - Why Join?

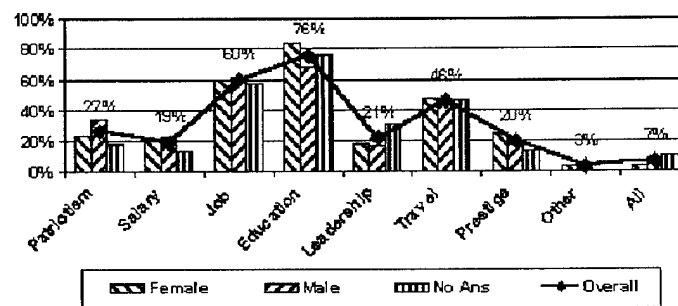


Figure 9. Airmen - Why Did You Join the Air Force



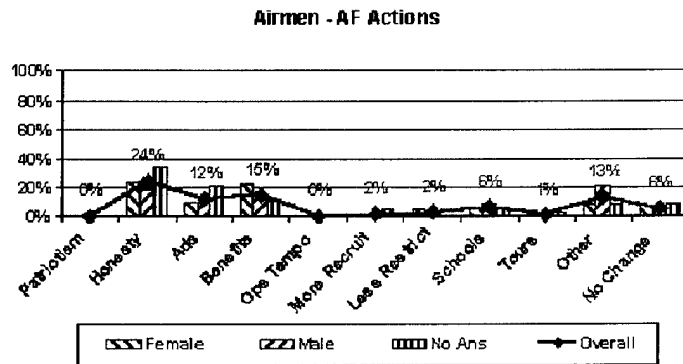


Figure 10. Airmen – What Should the Air Force Do to Improve Recruiting

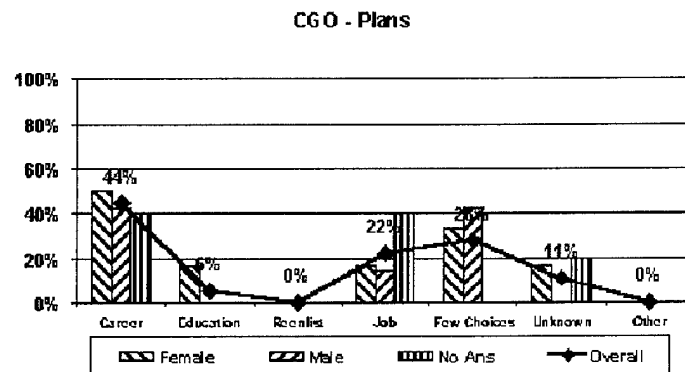


Figure 11. CGO – What Are Your Plans After Completing Your Initial Service Commitment

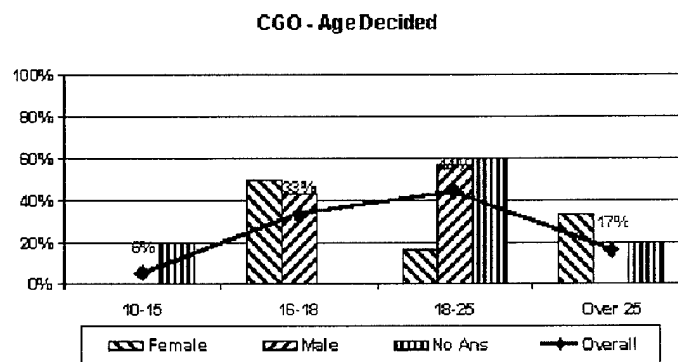
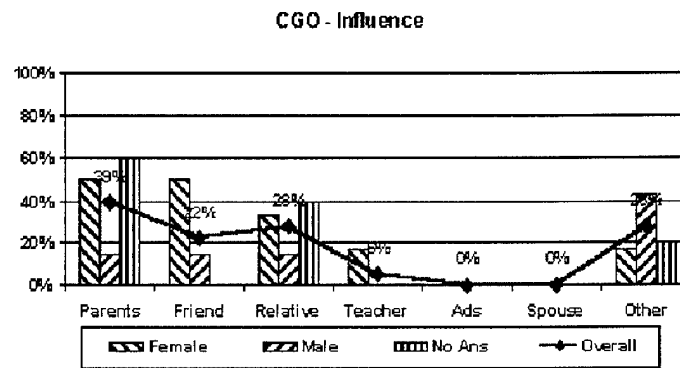
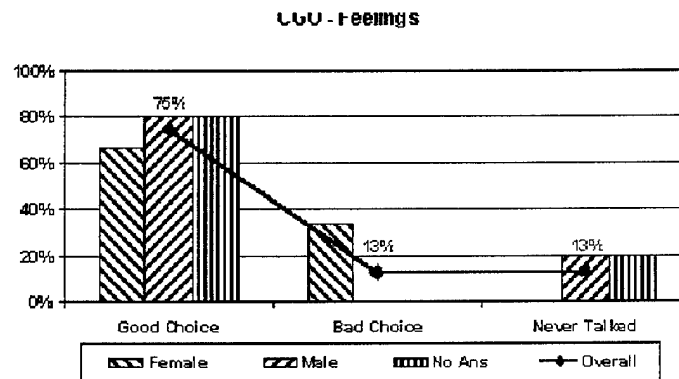


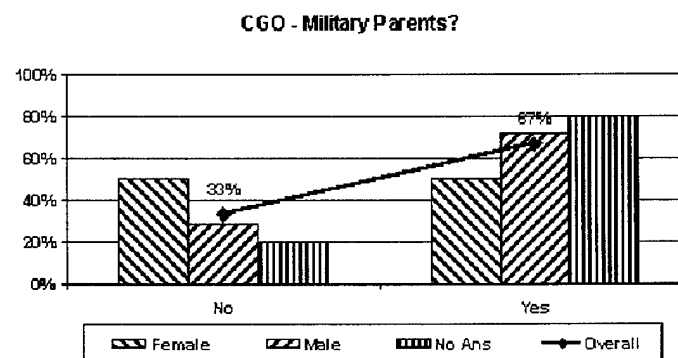
Figure 12. CGO – About How Old Were You When You Decided to Join the Air Force



**Figure 13. CGO - Who Helped You Most in Making the Decision to Join the Air Force**



**Figure 14. CGO - How Did the Military Person You Knew Feel About the Military**



**Figure 15. CGO - Have Your Parents Ever Served in the Military**

### CGO - Military Parent Branch

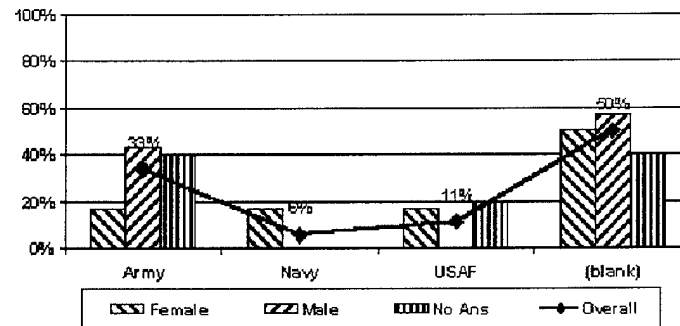


Figure 16. CGO - If Your Parents Served in the Military, Which Branch

### CGO - Recommend?

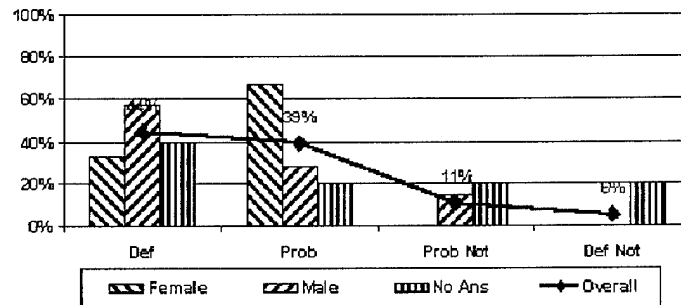


Figure 17. CGO - Would You Recommend Joining the Air Force to Your Friends and Family

### CGO - Why Recommend?

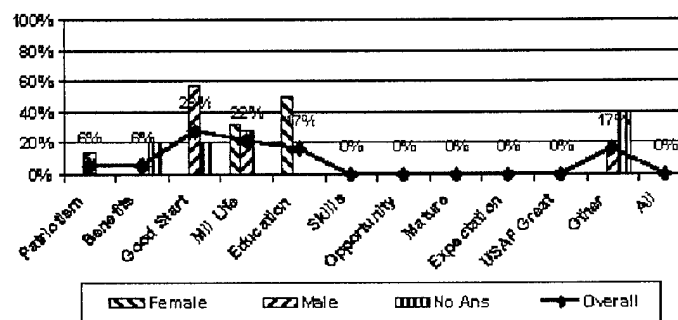
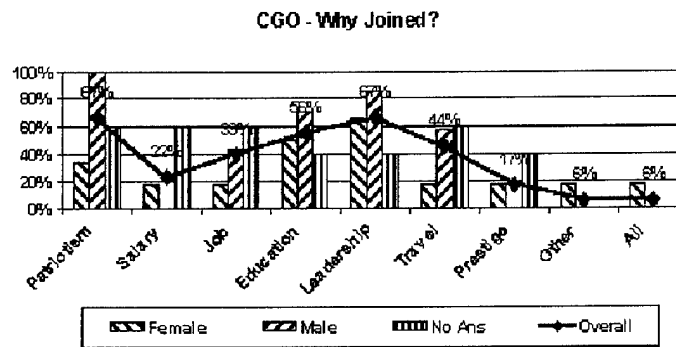
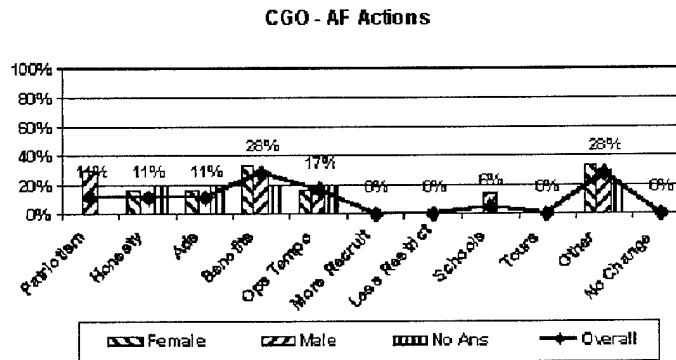


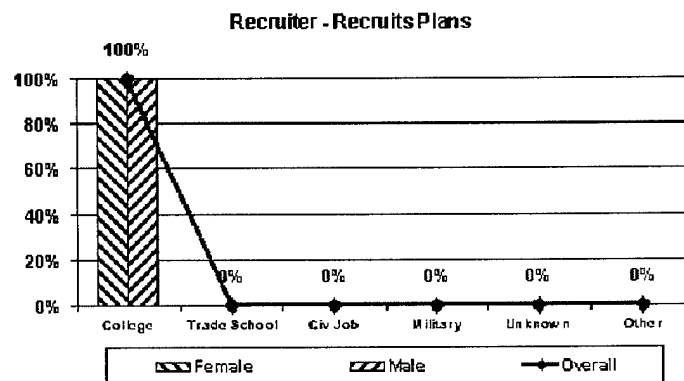
Figure 18. CGO - Why Would You Recommend the Air Force



**Figure 19.** CGO - Why Did You Join the Air Force



**Figure 20.** CGO - What Should the Air Force Do to Improve Recruiting



**Figure 21.** Recruiters - What Do Most Potential Recruits Plan to Do After High School

### Recruiter - Influencer

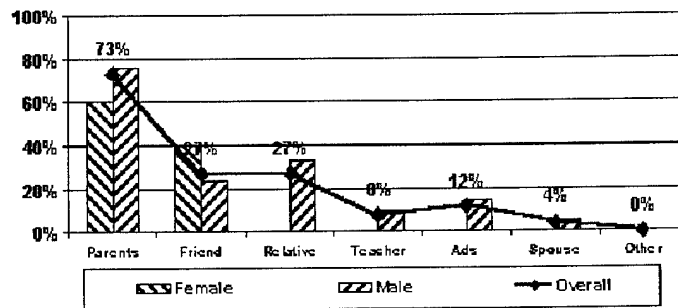


Figure 22. Recruiters - Who Influences Recruits Most in Their Future Career Decisions

### Recruiter - Why Recruits Join

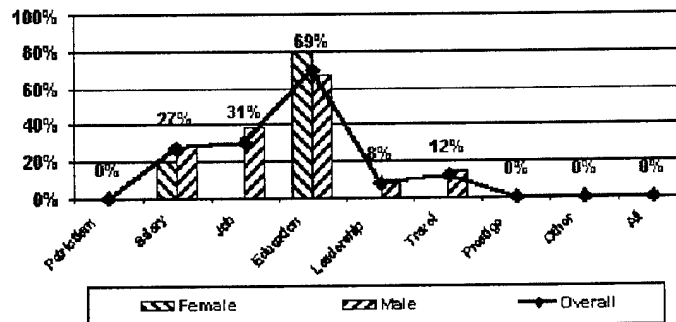


Figure 23. Recruiters - Why Do Recruits Join the Air Force

### Recruiters - Toughest Part of the Job

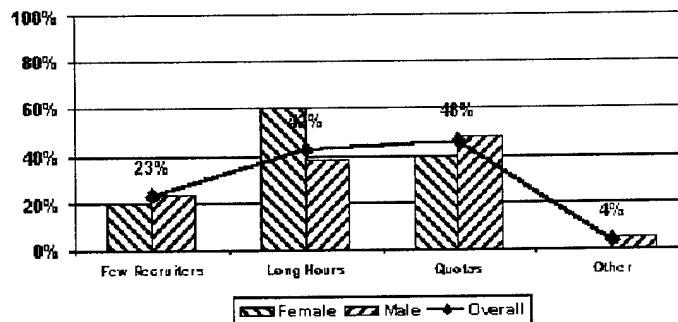


Figure 24. Recruiters - What is the Hardest Thing About Being a Recruiter

### Recruiter - Why Join?

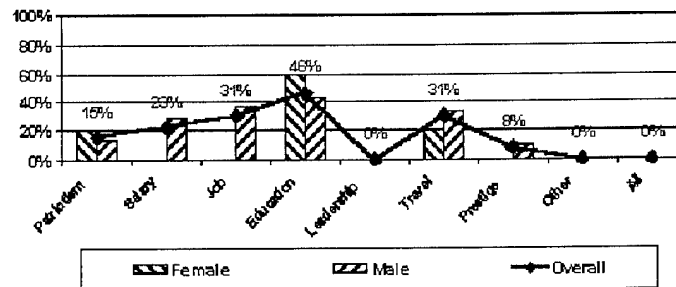


Figure 25. Recruiters - Why Did You (the Recruiter) Join the AF

### Recruiter - AF Actions

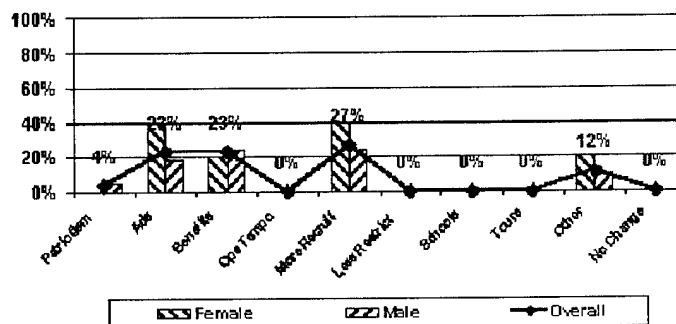


Figure 26. Recruiters - What Should the Air Force Do to Improve Recruiting

### MTI - Trainee Future Plans

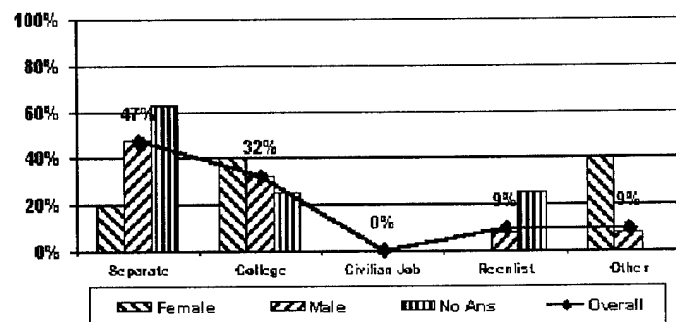


Figure 27. MTIs - What Do Most Trainees Plan to Do at the End of Their Commitment

### MTI - Trainee Influence

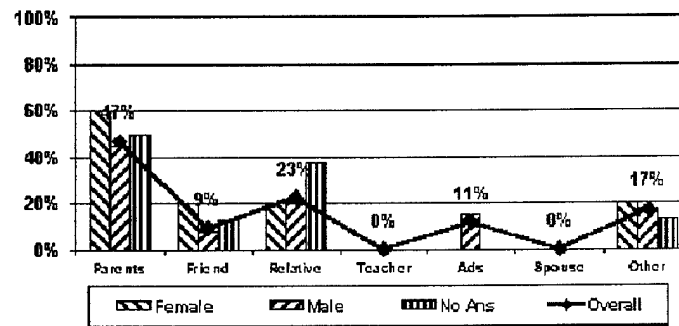


Figure 28. MTIs - Who Generally Helps Trainees Make the Decision to Enlist?

### MTI - Recommend USAF?

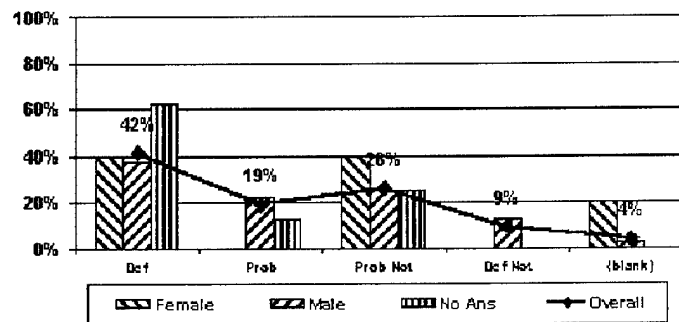


Figure 29. MTIs - Would You Recommend the Air Force to Your Friends or Family Members?

### MTI - Why Joined?

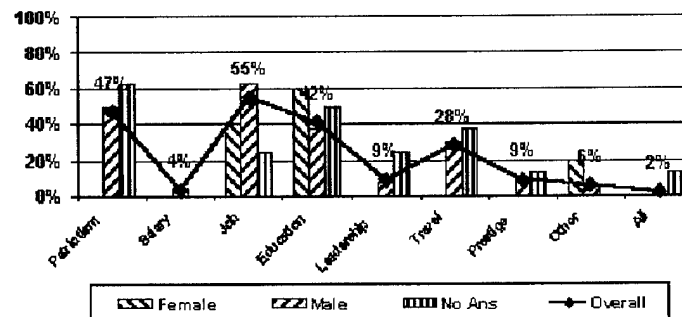


Figure 30. MTIs - Why Did You (the MTI) Join the Air Force?

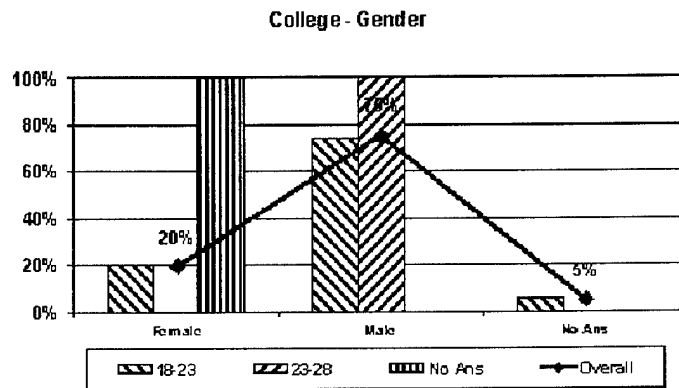


Figure 31. College Gender by Age

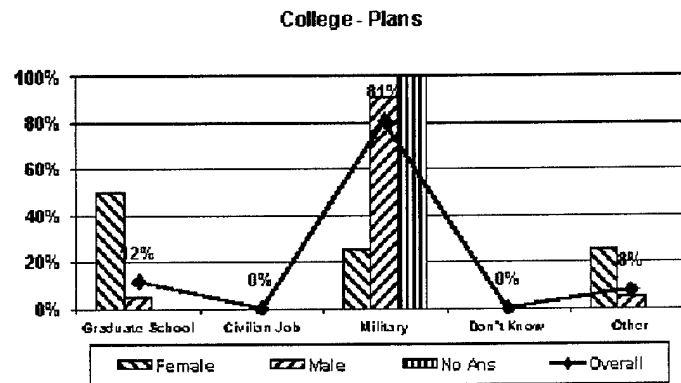


Figure 32. College - What Are Your Plans After Graduation

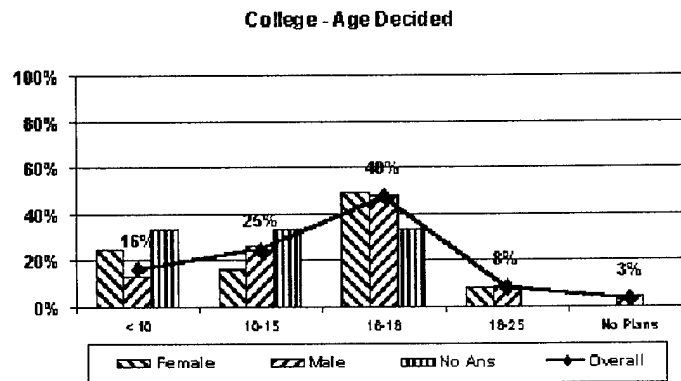
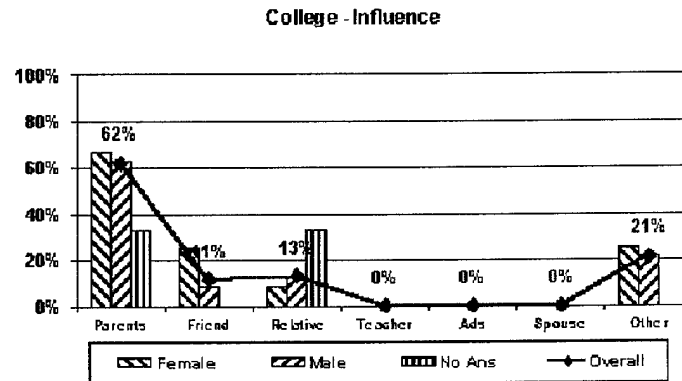
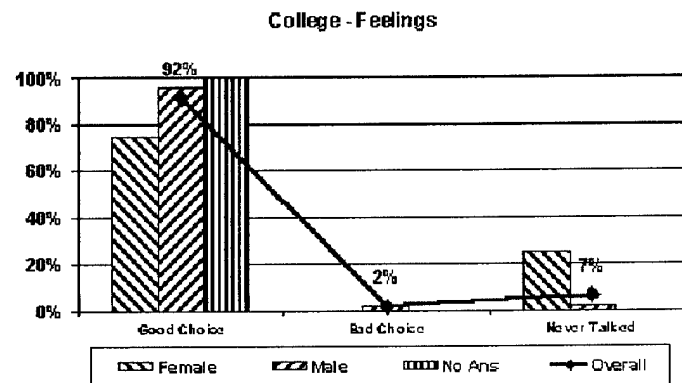


Figure 33. College - What Age Did You Start Planning Your Future

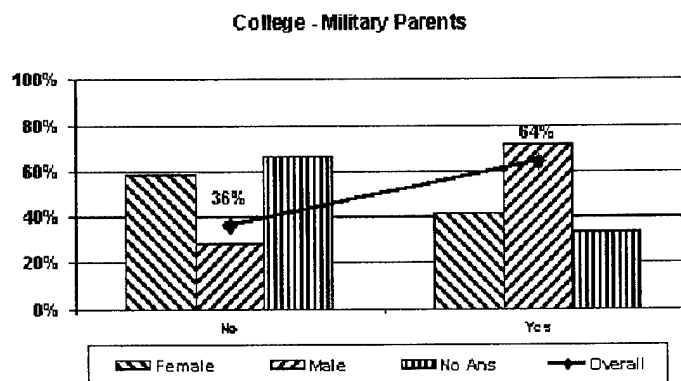




**Figure 34. College - Who Helps You Most in Making Future Career Decisions**



**Figure 35. College Students - How Did the Military Person Feel About Their Decision to Join**



**Figure 36. College - Have Your Parents Ever Served in the Military**

College - Branch of Military Parents

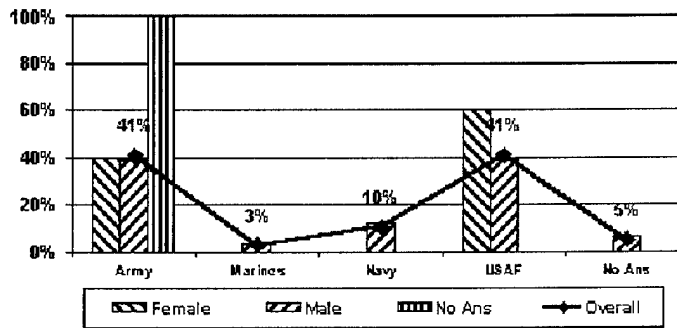


Figure 37. College - If Your Parents Served in the Military, Which Branch

College - Join?

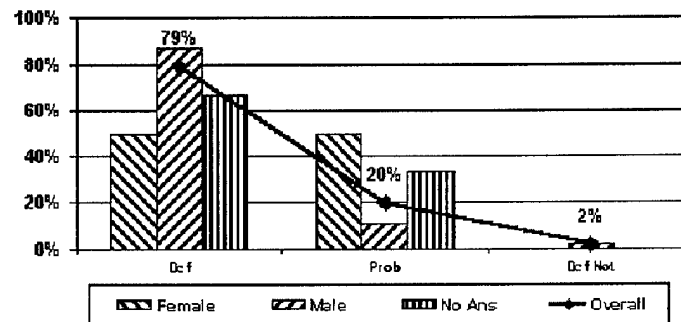


Figure 38. College - Would You Consider Joining the Air Force in the Future

College - AF Actions

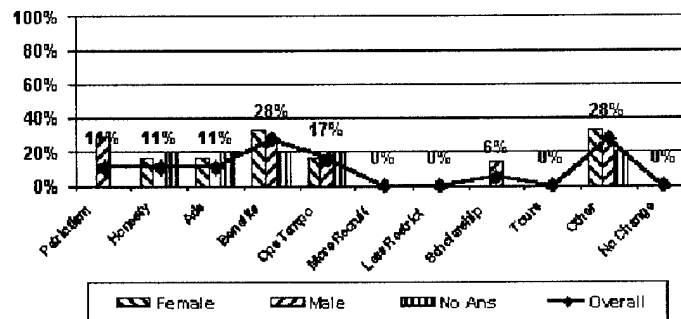


Figure 39. College - What Should the Air Force Do to Attract More People Like You

### High School - Gender

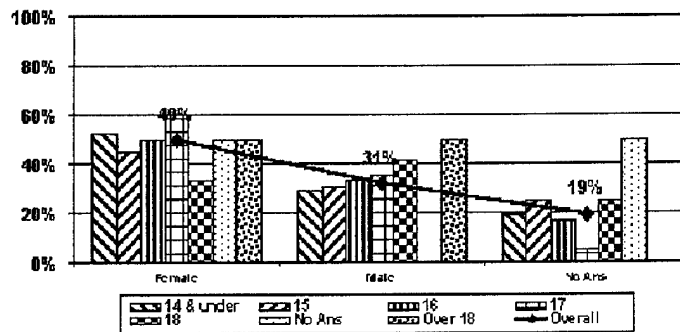


Figure 40. High School Students - Gender by Age

### High School - Plans

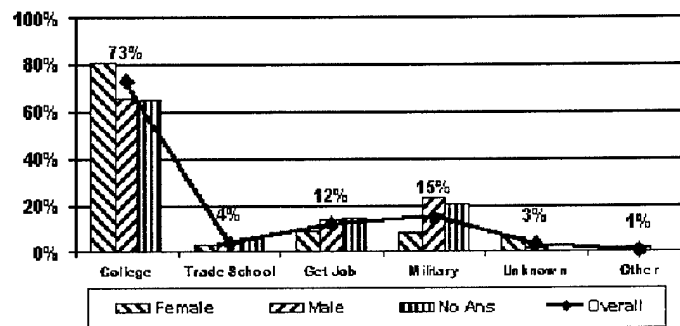


Figure 41. High School Students - What Are Your Plans After High School Graduation

### High School - Age Decided

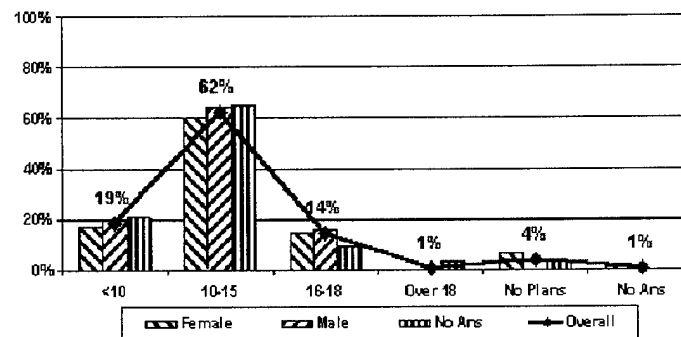
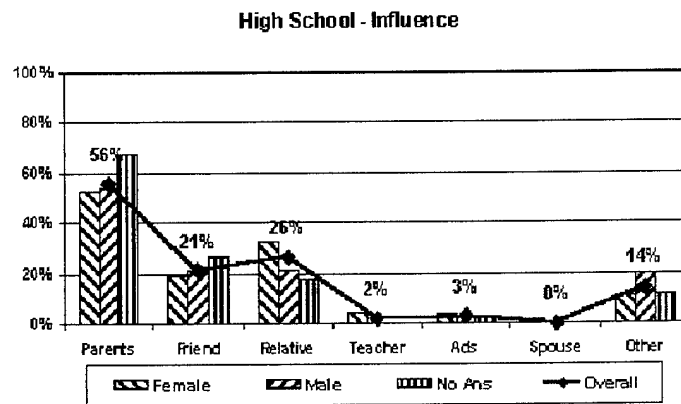
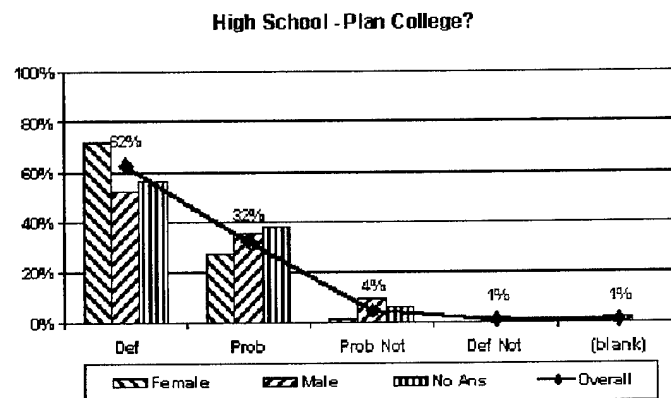


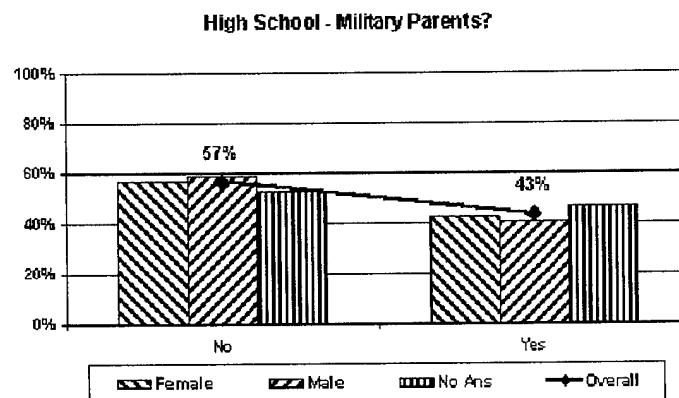
Figure 42. High School Students - What Age Did You Start Your Future Plans



**Figure 43.** High School Students - Who Helps Most in Making Decisions About Your Future



**Figure 44.** High School Students - Do You Plan to Go to College?



**Figure 45.** High School Students - Have Your Parents Ever Served in the Military?

### High School - Military Parent Branch

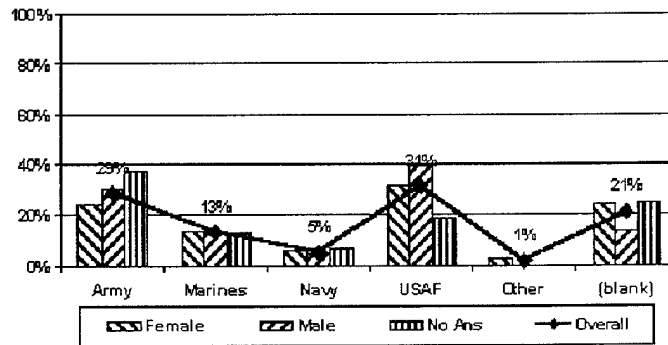


Figure 46. High School Students - If Your Parents Served in the Military...What Branch

### High School - Feelings

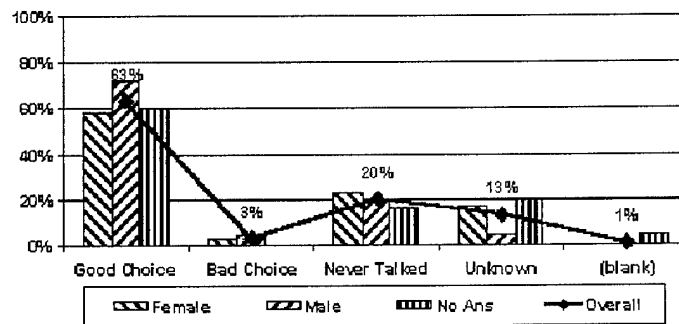


Figure 47. High School Students - How Did the Military Person Feel About Joining

### ADAF - Influence

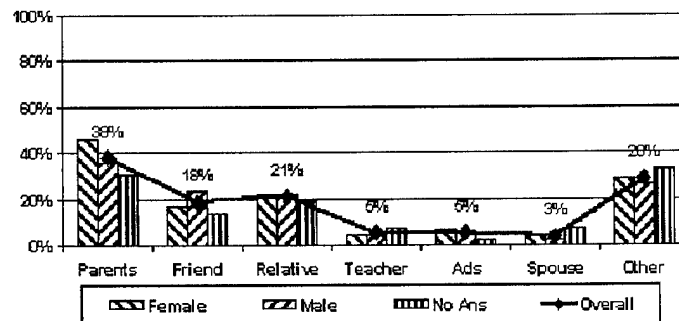
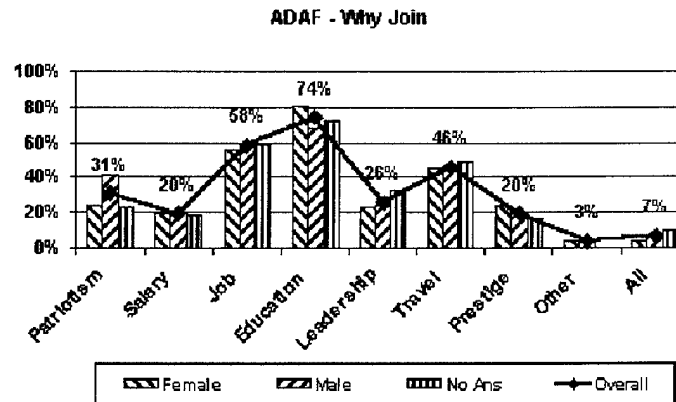
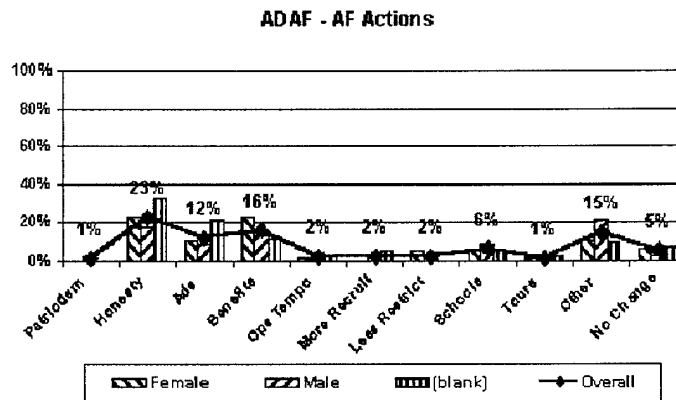


Figure 48. CGO/Airmen - Who Helped Most in Making Decisions About Your Future



**Figure 49.** CGO/Airmen – Why Did You Join the AF



**Figure 50.** CGO/Airmen – What Should the Air Force Do to Improve Recruiting

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